

## Encounters in Democracy

### ENCOUNTERS IN DEMOCRACY - Errata

- Page 12, opening sentence of last paragraph should read,  
The manuscript was completed in Spring 1980 and was at the printer at the time of the Tenth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party in April 1981.
- Page 13, an omitted line at page bottom should read,  
first border crossing, I asked them why, if life in their
- Page 228, line 8, the last word is *for* not *to*.
- Page 228, line 13, the first word is *increasing* not *increasingly*.



*For John, who encouraged me.*

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# in Democracy

A U.S. Journalist's View  
of the GDR

by Margrit Pittman

Encounters in Democracy  
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## Introduction

During my assignment as *Daily World* correspondent in Central Europe, the paper brought me home for a lecture tour. In a midwestern city I spoke about existing socialism. A member of the audience, an activist in the tenants' movement, said afterwards that she liked my talk because "it was so concrete." She added that she had been to meetings of other groups and "all they did was fight over theory."

This book is about the concrete example of existing socialism and how it was achieved and is practiced in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Our epoch is marked by two great interconnected struggles; the struggle for peace, and the struggle between the capitalist and socialist systems.

When the Soviet Union was established as the first socialist state in 1917, its presence immediately challenged the capitalist system. The essence of that challenge was and is: Which system is better able to provide a decent, creative and dignified life for its people?

From the start, socialism had more to offer the working people. It abolished exploitation of man by man, laid the basis for a just distribution of the wealth and established a society which offers equal opportunities to all.

The capitalist system has used wars, military intervention, and economic and diplomatic sanctions in its attempts to destroy or stifle the development of socialism. These efforts have been unsuccessful. The advantages enjoyed by the populations of socialist countries – security, full employment, stable prices, universal health care and free education on a scale never seen before – evoked



interest and raised demands for such advantages throughout the world.

Recognizing this, bourgeois propaganda switched gears. In his State of the Nation message in 1963, President John F. Kennedy projected the notion that the "American quality of life" would have to keep in step with the American quality of consumer goods. The "quality of life" notion was picked up in most industrially developed capitalist countries, in particular by the Social Democratic government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

This "quality of life" notion was put forth in a period of relative prosperity, the period before the consequences of the invasion of Vietnam had undermined the "quality" of life in the United States, a period when reported unemployment fluctuated between 5.5 percent and 3.5 percent of the labor force in the United States, and between 1.2 percent and 0.3 percent in the Federal Republic of Germany. (U. S. Census figures for the 1960s.) But the central boast, as Kennedy's speech shows, was made around the quality and quantity of consumer goods.

By the 1970s, two developments rendered this approach obsolete. One was the advent of the economic crisis that enveloped the entire capitalist world. It brought inflation, mass unemployment, insecurity – a painful deterioration of life's quality in all industrially developed capitalist countries. On the other hand, the living standard of the industrially developed socialist countries of the Warsaw Pact steadily increased – especially in the quality and quantity of housing and consumer goods – thus making it more and more evident that socialism offers a superior "quality of life."

It was then that the think tanks of capitalism developed a new approach. Abandoning the boast of a superior "quality of life," they raised the claim that bourgeois democracy – despite its crisis – offers its people more extensive "human rights."

The nature of the "human rights" drive was disclosed by syndicated columnist Joseph Kraft in the *New York Post*, February 26, 1977. "In the past, resistance to the regimes of the Soviet bloc was concentrated in a few *isolated individuals*," he wrote. "Now it is an organized affair. In the Soviet Union, there is a committee of dissidents – *with ties to the West, financial resources and good public relation techniques*. Similar, and in some cases stronger, groups exist in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and even East Germany." (Emphasis added. M. P.) It is widely acknowledged that the U. S. government will give support to malcontents in socialist countries; the story is told that a U. S. embassy official said they would support opponents to the socialist regime "even if there is only one left."

Essentially this book will deal with the question of human rights under socialism for the population as a whole – or, more precisely, the nature of socialist democracy.

The reader might ask why the German Democratic Republic was selected as an example. It is one of the smaller countries of the socialist community with a population of 17 million. (There are more than 350 million people in the Warsaw Pact countries.) It started making its way toward socialism a mere 30 odd years ago, while the Soviet Union launched itself on that path in 1917.

I selected the GDR for several reasons. I was born and raised in Germany and – from my early teens – subjected to the Nazis' virulent anti-Semitism. It was my good fortune to escape the fate of six million Jews murdered by the Nazis, and it has been the profound satisfaction of my life to see a socialist state rise on German soil, free of exploitation and racism.

The fact that the GDR rose from the physical and moral rubble left behind by fascism is another point of special interest. The struggle that had to be waged to overcome reactionary attitudes in a population steeped



in fascist propaganda for twelve years, the majority of whom had acquiesced to the fascists' crimes, is instructive for us in the United States.

Lastly, the two German states offer a unique, almost laboratory-type basis for comparison of the two systems. From the founding of the German state in 1871 until 1945, its people had a common history and economy. After 1945, they developed into two separate nations – one capitalist and the other socialist. Accordingly, the lives of their people differ profoundly. This book hopes to inform the reader as to what the life and democracy of existing socialism in an industrially developed country has to offer.

The book is based chiefly on interviews and observations during my stay. For historic accuracy I consulted *Deutsche Geschichte in Daten*, published by the Institute for History of the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin (Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1967). Other sources are indicated in the text footnotes.

The manuscript was completed in Spring 1980 and at the time of the Tenth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party in April 1981. The event fully confirmed the directions of the process of building socialism made in researching this book. A postscript on the direction outlined by the Congress has been added.

## 1 Train Between Two Systems

The train on the 200-mile run from Berlin, capital of the German Democratic Republic, to Hamburg in the Federal Republic of Germany crosses three borders which illustrate the post-World War II realities – from the GDR to West Berlin, a politically independent city; back into the GDR; and two hours later, into the Federal Republic of Germany.

These realities were also reflected in the discussion of the five elderly passengers in my compartment, GDR senior citizens on their way to visit relatives in the FRG. Talk was lively. They were all veteran travelers to the FRG and spoke with eager anticipation of the good things in the capitalist German state.

First on their lists were the superior consumer goods, ranging from "silky soft" multicolored toilet paper and household gadgets to strawberries out-of-season and the unending variety of fashions.

They talked about the fact that cars could be bought on credit, and repaired with ease, while – despite the much higher prices – there were waiting lists for cars in their country and car repairs could be a nightmare.

A woman spoke with awe of the fact that her cousin goes food shopping twice a week: "She visits all stores in the neighborhood and you should see the bargains."

One man complained that "they always want you to do something. They want you to join your tenants' groups, give money for Vietnam or Chile, take part in National Front activities and vote. I want to be left alone."

After they had a chance to see my passport, during the



country is so onerous, they did not move to the other German state. This is possible for people who reach pension age, and the FRG government offers them a pension.

"It is hard to move an old tree," one of the men said, "and there are certain things we have gotten used to." These things it turned out, were achievements of socialism, a system just volubly downgraded.

"We don't have a drug problem and have very little crime," a woman admitted, and added, "my sister-in-law in the West never goes out at night, she's afraid." The man who wanted "to be left alone" said that rents in the FRG are too high, and added, "nobody cares about you there. When I came home after my operation a woman from the People's Solidarity came to tidy up twice a week, and one of the Young Pioneers in the house did my shopping every day." The People's Solidarity is a volunteer neighborhood organization that helps the elderly.

Another fellow traveler, who had been eloquent in praising the advantages of the West, said that she regularly visits theaters and concerts through the union at her former place of work. "I go with my old collective and it keeps me in touch with people," she said. "It's also very inexpensive. Even with a good pension I wouldn't be able to afford cultural activities in the West."

The fact is that most of the people who travel to the FRG return; and very few take advantage of the FRG pension offer.

A word about the travel restrictions so frequently criticized in our media. It is true that travel to non-socialist countries is limited. Two reasons dictate this restriction. One is the shortage of Western currency, which is spent for more urgent items – such as the import of raw materials, technology, and to some extent consumer goods.

The other limitation derives from the long history of Western brain-drain efforts to undermine the socialist German state, and other disruptive activities.<sup>1</sup> Even to-

day, FRG policies vis-à-vis the GDR are an important reason for restricted travel. Among these is the policy that GDR citizenship is not recognized by the FRG. This means that GDR citizens who travel to the FRG are considered subject to FRG laws and therefore cannot be offered the protection normally offered foreign nationals abroad.

Unmentioned in our press is the fact that a very large percentage of GDR citizens frequently travel abroad. In an average year, 12 million foreign trips are recorded for the country's 17 million citizens. Certainly some go more frequently than others, but it is still an impressive figure. Three-fourth of these trips are to socialist countries, especially to neighboring Poland and Czechoslovakia, for which no passports or visas are needed. It is just as easy as visiting Canada from the United States.

"It used to be a considerable source of irritation that people could not visit their families in the FRG and West Berlin except with special permission," a friend told me. "Only people of pension age can freely travel there, because these visits were – and still are – used as a lever against our country. Of course it is annoying to be unable to visit relatives though these relatives can visit us.

"For today's youth it is not a big problem anymore, because they no longer have strong family ties there. Still, it would be desirable to permit people to travel freely anywhere, but that depends on the advance of detente and improvements in relations between our states."

My traveling companions – all pensioners – reflected the important fact that attitudes prevail even after socioeconomic realities have changed. This is especially so in a state where, with the flick of a switch, FRG radio and television come into nearly every home. There are only a few small areas where FRG television cannot be received.

These media, just as ours, work overtime to promote



consumerism, the main pillar of the capitalist economy. They create demands for items that must be purchased, including health, housing, recreation and culture in addition to clothes, cars, gadgets and other consumer goods.

## Consumerism no longer king

To understand the functioning of socialism one must learn to think along completely new lines. The premise of the socialist economy is outlined in the GDR Constitution which states, in Article 9, sections 1 and 2: "The national economy of the GDR is based upon the socialist ownership of the means of production. . ." and it "serves the constantly improving satisfaction of the material and cultural needs of the citizens. . ."

This rather innocuous-sounding phrase embodies the basic difference between the two systems. In any capitalist state the national income is distributed in such a way that the lion's share goes to the capitalists.

Bourgeois statistics take great care to obscure these facts. In a study about exploitation in the FRG, Rolf Gutermuth exposes the tricks used by the official accounting system. Among other things, he points out that when the "employed" are counted, not only workers but managerial employees are also listed, and even that part of their incomes derived from sources other than their work for example, capital investments. In addition, the statistics are based on gross income and fail to show that direct and indirect taxes and other deductions amount to about 30 percent of wages and salaries. And finally the entire FRG state budget, "which accounts for at least a share of the national income equal to that of the employed," is excluded from the calculation. Therefore, bourgeois claims that the working population's share of the national income amounts to 70 percent is false.

A scientific analysis of FRG statistics conducted along

class lines by the Institute for International Politics and Economics, Gutermuth writes, shows that, in 1972, 29.8 percent of the national income accrued to workers and employees, 14.3 percent to capitalists and other self-employed and 30.3 percent to the state, which in turn paid 8.2 percent in wages. The remainder, according to the statistic used, is divided between pensioners, welfare recipients and government employees.

Gutermuth concludes that "the working class, which even in official watered-down FRG statistics makes up 80 percent of the working population, received only about 35 percent of the national income – only 30 percent if taxation is taken into account. The bourgeoisie and the imperialist state on the other hand (including the non-capitalist self-employed who could not be separated out statistically) receive over 50 percent." <sup>2</sup>

In the GDR, based on the "socialist ownership of the means of production," the entire national income serves the needs of the community. Implementing this policy, large areas of personal needs are taken out of the realm of "what money can buy" and put into the realm of what society will provide. This is a process that develops over the years, because it can only advance to the extent to which production – socially owned – can provide the needed funds.

While this process will be dealt with in various fields throughout this book, I will illustrate it here in the areas of housing, health and vacations.

As a result of prewar capitalist housing policies and the war destruction the GDR was faced with an extreme housing shortage. From 1949 to 1971, 1,240,000 new housing units were built. In 1971, at the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the decision was made to solve the housing problem by 1990. To achieve that, 2 million housing units will have to be made available. These fall into three categories – state housing, co-operatives, and private dwellings. In all cases, rents and



maintenance are low; rents on modernized prewar apartments remain at their prewar level.

The average monthly expenditure for housing, including utilities, in 1977 was just under 5 percent of the income of a family of four, two of them dependent children.<sup>3</sup> In addition, large families and those with the lowest incomes receive a subsidy.

In comparison, FRG tenants have been subject to huge rent and utility increases since 1970. As reported in the Duesseldorf employers' publication *Handelsblatt* of January 11, 1979, rents in 1971 had risen, as compared to 1970, by 48.7 percent for public housing and by 38.4 percent for private housing. Cost of electricity had risen 78.7 percent, gas 51.8 percent and oil a skyrocketing 138.8 percent.

The right to comprehensive health care is also taken for granted in the GDR. All aspects of medical care are covered, including glasses, medicines and dental care and, of course, full maternity care.

One of the most striking items in health expenditures are curative and prophylactic treatments in health resorts. Patients receive the stays free of charge or for a small fee, in addition to their paid vacation. Workers in health-hazardous occupations have a higher quota of these preventive treatments and cures. Expenditures for spa treatments have nearly doubled since 1965, and now more than 350,000 workers enjoy these treatments annually.

Also taken for granted is the right to a vacation away from home. The Free German Trade Unions (FDGB) offer vacation trips for members and their families, at prices lower than what it would cost to feed the family at home and offer a substantial discount in fares for the entire family. The 8.5-million-member labor organization offers about 1.65 million such trips annually, even greater than the 1.2 million vacations sold at cost by the GDR travel agency.

Despite all this I have heard people grumble because their application for a prophylactic cure had been turned down for more urgent cases, or because union vacation trips are not offered frequently enough. Both these facilities are distributed by trade union commissions. One of these commission members – elected, unpaid functionaries – told me about these complaints and added placidly, "It just shows how expectations rise under socialism. But it will be some time until we can afford to give everyone what they want and by then new demands will appear."

One popular demand that causes a lot of controversy is private car ownership.

"My nephew is buying a Volkswagen Rabbit on time," the woman with the bargain-hunting cousin bragged. In the GDR, automobile buyers have to get on a list, wait several years and then pay cash on the line. What is more, the price of a car is more than double of that in the FRG. The waiting period – depending on the make and model of the car – can be as much as ten years, and it is not unusual for 18-year olds to get on a list in the expectation that they'll have saved up enough money when their turn comes. But waiting lists can be curtailed. Key enterprises receive their own consignment of cars, allotted by a trade-union commission, and victims of the Nazi regime are also given special consideration. By 1978, 33 percent of the GDR households owned cars.

Why does this situation prevail, why doesn't a planned economy provide enough cars for the population? This is a matter of national priorities. Cars need gasoline, require maintenance and repairs, and are a hazard to the environment. Gasoline has to be imported, and that portion of it that does not come from the Soviet Union, must be paid for in scarce Western currency. Repair and maintenance can be organized but when there is a labor shortage, again, there is the matter of priorities.

Maintenance, service and repair problems had become



such a problem that a 1978 plenum of the Central Committee of the SED had directed that more facilities would have to be set up.

Expansion of the automobile market, despite great popular pressure, is braked by two important considerations. The environmentalists oppose it because of pollution and congestion. An even larger section of the population argues that it is better to invest in improving public transportation. The fact is that public transportation in the GDR is much better and cheaper than in the U.S. or, for that matter, in the FRG. City transport is cheap – a ride on any Berlin bus, streetcar or subway costs one fifth of a ride in New York. In addition, some large plants maintain special transport facilities for their workers and these frequently include stops at child-care facilities that belong to the plant.

The fact is that the car is the most expensive surface transportation and some people in the GDR say they would give up their cars if public transportation to recreation areas were improved. It is not clear just what they mean by this, short of house-to-house hourly service to their summer cottages, but it is quite clear that it will take years to resolve this conflict.

Invidious comparisons of consumer goods and their prices – as practiced extensively by the capitalist media and echoed by my fellow travelers – help obscure two completely different approaches to distribution of wealth.

Quite often, well-meaning visitors from the United States asked me why coffee, cigarettes, furs, leather goods, arts and crafts and cameras are “so expensive” in the GDR by U.S. standards. The first, most obvious answer is that inflation has so undermined the value of the dollar abroad that it buys less every year. The value of the dollar vis-à-vis the GDR mark has dropped more than 50 percent since the late 1960, so that the 20-pfenning fare for public transportation has more than doubled if you have to exchange dollars to pay for it.

More complicated, but also more significant, is the explanation that socialism has an entirely different set of values.

The problem is not what consumer goods cost, but what most of the people can afford to buy after their fixed expenses – taxes, rent, medical care, dues, insurance and credit payments – have been met. In the average household of four (two of them children) all these expenses amount to about 19 percent of the monthly gross income; an average of 74 percent is spent on consumer goods; the remainder on miscellaneous items.

On the other hand, benefits from social expenditures increase steadily. In 1970, these amounted to 360 marks a month for a family of four; they increased to 540 marks in 1975 and to 680 marks in 1980. This sum includes state subsidies for housing, education, health, recreation and culture as well as for public transportation, and price supports for basic foods, school lunches and essential consumer goods. It is part of socialist planning that this share of the population's income should increase along with the wages to guarantee that basic needs are met for all income groups.

In the FRG, which justly prides itself on fairly extensive social services, won in generations of working-class and union struggles, the development is just the reverse. This is shown in the official “Social Budget” submitted by the Federal government. The 1978 issue showed that the annual per capita increase for social expenditures in the 1970 to 1975 period was 13.1 percent, which just about covered the loss due to inflation. This increase was scheduled to decline to 6.3 percent, or less than half, by 1980. What is more, the source of these funds was slated to be shifted to make the individual taxpayer bear a greater burden. The employers' contribution was to decrease from 31.1 to 29.4 percent, and the Federal government's share from 25.2 to 23.6 percent, while the taxes from individuals would increase



from 22.8 to 25.3 percent. Benefits of a market economy!

With these basic trends in mind, one might ask if socialism means a denial of the availability of a profusion of consumer goods. Not at all.

"Of course we have a refrigerator and a television set," a woman in the train said indignantly, "though I haven't bought a washing machine. They are expensive and it is easier to send the laundry out." By 1978, nearly all households (98 percent) had refrigerators, 86 percent had television sets and 78 percent automatic washing machines.

The attitude of my traveling companions was summed up by Hermann Axen, member of the Politbureau and secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party at a scientific conference in Sofia, Bulgaria. "Surmounting the material basis of capitalism is a comparatively rapid and all-embracing process," he said. "Surmounting bourgeois ideology and morality, however, and the vestiges of capitalism in people's minds is a continuous process. . . . The imperialist subversive centers make use of these retrograde and reactionary ideas in the minds of certain people. . . . even in the developed socialist countries there are people with a backward and hostile outlook. This will be inevitable as long as two opposite social systems exist in the world, as long as class struggle is what determines the meaning of the world's development." 4

The change that has already occurred in attitudes about money and about the role of the state in providing basic family needs was brought home to me when I had a discussion with a chairperson of a tenants' group. The house - built prior to World War II - was being completely modernized. The tenants were given the choice of moving out during the remodeling and move back when it was completed (at the same basic rent), or to move to another apartment which had to be equivalent or better.

I asked the tenant leader, Ms. Fritz, about costs, in great detail. Who would pay the moving expense? How much would the increased cost be for installation of hot water and new bathrooms? And what would be the cost of housing at the "tenants' hotel," the interim quarters for those who wished to move back. She answered my questions patiently, and it turned out that all costs to the tenants were negligible.

She finally looked at me in a kind of exasperation. "You people from the West," she said, "always talk about money. My nephew from the FRG, who visits quite frequently, also does that. In the discussions in the tenants' group, the matter of money is seldom mentioned. They all know that this will not be a problem to them. Their concern is when the work will be started, how it will be done and when they can move back."

### Tale of two families

These basic differences also emerged in interviews with two Berlin families living only a few miles apart, one in the GDR and the other in West Berlin. Both were youngish couples with two school-age children.

Oskar Mueller was a professional translator for a GDR government agency, and his wife, Ilse, a pharmaceutical assistant in a large concern. They lived on Karl Marx Allee in a three-room apartment, consisting of a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen large enough to accommodate a dining table, a bathroom, a hall and a good-sized storage room. Their furniture was modern and of good quality. Their rent was 120 marks a month, which included central heating, and utilities cost them another 20 marks. Their joint monthly income after deductions: 2,600 marks. They expressed no concern about the family's finances, said that they buy food and clothing without a view to saving money and that they had



saved up enough to pay for a car, which they would receive shortly. "We didn't stint to save this money, it wouldn't have been worth it," Oskar said.

The greatest pressure in their household is time, they said, and they observe a strict schedule. They get up shortly before six a. m. to get breakfast, and then wake the girls and see that they eat and that the beds are made. The parents leave at 6:45, the girls shortly after.

On Mondays the entire family leaves the house at 5:45 a. m. to go swimming at a nearby pool. On those days Ilse starts work half an hour later - without being docked - because sports activities are encouraged. The entire family eat their midday meals, a hot lunch, away from home at work or in school. These meals are subsidized and cost from 1 to 2.50 marks.

The younger daughter still attends extended day care, which is available in every school through the fourth grade. She also takes ballet lessons in the afternoon. The older one gets home after lunch, does her homework and is then off to guitar lessons, sports or meetings of the Young Pioneers. There is a charge for the ballet and music lessons, but Ilse says, it is "not worth mentioning."

The Muellers go to the theater or to concerts once or twice a month, and on special occasions they take their children. Tickets are gotten through the trade union at one or another's place of work. During the winter they also visit exhibitions or take in a movie on weekends.

When weather permits they spend weekends at "a little summer place we have. Nothing fancy, we fixed it up ourselves." It is 16 miles from the city and can be reached by commuter train. However, they don't spend their vacations there but take some kind of trip every year. One year they were in the Soviet Union, "where Oskar has some friends from his student days." The children always spend two weeks in summer camp, run by the unions and very inexpensive, and that year they had an extra week at their grandparents.

Another year the family had trade-union vacation places at the Baltic Sea which, Oskar said, "cost only 125 marks for adults and 30 marks per child for two weeks, and the train fare was reduced by a third, with half-price for children. It was much cheaper than our trip to the Soviet Union, where we had to pay full price."

The Meiers' life in West Berlin was quite different. Gerhard Meier had a job as a proofreader in a printing plant and felt that his job was secure. But his wife, Christa, who worked on the assembly line at a Telefunken plant, worried about her job. Another West Berlin Telefunken plant had closed down and moved to Manila. Their joint monthly income after deductions was 2,450 marks.

Their four-room apartment cost them 415 marks a month in 1975. "It is one of 600,000 city apartments still subject to some rent control. Still, the rent here has gone up 200 percent since 1955. A four-room apartment in a new building is about 2,000 marks a month." Gerhard said there were more than 75,000 people in line for apartments like his.

In addition to the rent, they paid about 80 marks for utilities, up from 50 marks the year before.

Their one big luxury, they said, is a car which they were buying from Gerhard's mother and therefore could pay off in "easy" installments of 150 marks a month. The car is not purely a luxury. It helps buy food at discount markets once a week. "We buy meat at a city-run store, where meat of diseased animals is sold. It is quite safe, because it is carefully inspected and much cheaper," Christa said.

They said they spend practically no money on clothes for themselves and they buy only the essential for the boys. "A pair of jeans is 40 marks and they don't last."

Both are most concerned about the children and their future. "The classes are too large and the teachers don't care," Christa said. "The children are tracked right from



the beginning and it is nearly impossible for a working-class child to matriculate." Her older son got into a university preparatory program, but after half a year all the students who didn't achieve certain grades were kicked out. "He couldn't make it," Christa said with resignation. "He just wasn't prepared."

The Meiers spend practically no money for recreational activities. Movie admissions are 5 to 8 marks. "In the summer we try to go swimming together at least on one of the weekend days," Gerhard said. While both Meiers are entitled to substantial paid vacations - Christa to 26 working days and Gerhard to 24, for which their union contracts provide time-and-a-half pay - it is still only enough for the most modest kind of vacation. They visit his parents on the Baltic, but since they have political differences with them that creates problems. Unions have resorts, but they are too expensive. Gerhard said that prices range from 13 to 23 marks a day for adults, and 6.50 to 15.50 for children, which would make it between 50 and 75 marks a day for the family.

They did buy camping equipment, but even the fees at campgrounds are usually fairly high, they said. One year they managed to get to a youth hostel on the Baltic coast, where the charge was only 7.50 marks per person per day including meals, and they enjoyed that, despite the fact that there was not much privacy. The cost of children's summer camps in West Berlin or West Germany is 480 marks and "the food is bad," Christa said.

"We have no sense of security," Gerhard said. "And what worries us most is the children's future."

On the other hand the Muellers, in the GDR, said they have no feeling of insecurity and worry about their children's future only if one of them gets into difficulties in school. The idea of unemployment is completely alien to them. "Our parents still had a real struggle to survive," Oskar said. "But our future is socially secure."

## 2 The New Beginning

During a visit to the former Buchenwald Concentration Camp I met a group of 25 children about 13 years of age who were being guided through the camp and its museum by an elderly man. From their talk I gathered that he was a former inmate who had participated in the armed uprising against the Nazis on April 11, 1945, resisting evacuation orders which meant certain death. In fact, the head of Hitler's secret police, Gestapo Chief Heinrich Himmler, had issued an order that all inmates of concentration camps, evacuated before the allied advance, were to be killed. In this way the fascists attempted to obliterate evidence of their bestial activities. Though Himmler's official orders were issued that April, the extermination of concentration camp inmates as the fascists retreated had been going on throughout Europe.

Some of the youngsters told me that they were visiting the camp as part of their preparation for the "youth dedication." At the age of 14, they said, young people are initiated into society with solemn ceremony. In preparation, their classes visit a concentration camp, have discussions with anti-fascist veterans, participate in special activities for international solidarity, and organize various other kinds of activities to anchor what they have learned about Hitler's ignominious rule and the heroic resistance.

Anni Sindermann is one of the concentration camp inmates who escaped. She had been an inmate of Ravensbrueck, where 132,000 women from all over Europe were held prisoner and 92,000 perished. As the allied armies were approaching, the fascists evacuated the women to



the Baltic coast, where they loaded them on barges which they then took out to sea and sank. Ms. Sindermann escaped.

She is the daughter of a textile worker. "We were terribly poor," she said. When she was 11 years old she started working after school as a "mother's helper" and at 14 was "lucky" to get an unskilled job in a textile plant, through her mother's efforts. It was during the post-World War I depression and jobs were scarce. At 15 she joined the Communist youth organization and at 17 became a member of the Communist Party.

After Germany's industrial and financial interests installed Hitler in power in 1933, Ms. Sindermann was arrested, let go, and then rearrested in 1935, when she was sentenced to a five-year prison term. After her release she again took up the perilous life of underground struggle. She and her husband were part of the underground organization led by Anton Saefkow, who organized resistance in industrial plants. When she, her husband and other leaders of the group were betrayed and arrested in 1944, they had established contacts and were carrying on activities in plants throughout the country - in 30 large enterprises in Berlin alone.

After her escape she made her way to Dresden, where she hoped to find her mother and child. Her husband had perished. "Dresden had been firebombed by U.S. and British forces in February 1945 when the Soviet troops were only 35 miles outside the city," she said. "We had heard about that even in camp. During that bombing the city was laid to waste and about 100,000 people died."

"The first task," she recalled, "was to stem the incredible misery and to instill the will to rebuild." She obtained a job in a cardboard factory; since she was an experienced trade union organizer, that became her main concern.

"The people were demoralized, bitter, suspicious and

hungry. It was incredibly difficult to get them organized to do anything. The only thing all seemed to have in common was that they were tired of war and bloodshed and wanted peace."

This wish for peace had been evidenced increasingly in the months of the allied advance. It had inspired Himmeler on April 3, 1945, to issue an order to shoot all males in any house displaying the white flag of surrender.

There were those who tried to counter the Nazis' devastating "last stand" policy, with its orders to destroy any position from which they withdrew. In Leipzig, one of the major cities of eastern Germany, activists of the National Committee for a Free Germany, an anti-fascist coalition, had distributed leaflets in mid-April calling on the population to surrender to save their city. Ironically, U. S. occupation forces who entered the city a few days later, issued an order on April 26 banning the National Committee.

This ban was one of many incidents which showed that the struggle about the nature of the future Germany was under way well before the entire country was liberated. It is a struggle that will be dealt with in various chapters of this book, because it was decisive in shaping the two German states.

During the months of the allied advance, anti-fascist action committees were formed. Ms. Sindermann told how, after her escape, she and a companion, both of them nearly starving, sought shelter in a small town. The family who took them in and fed them went off to call in one of their neighbors, who they knew as a former Communist. He came with two others. "It was our very first party meeting in that town in many years," she said. "When the Red Army came a few days later we mobilized a few anti-fascists and offered our help. They were most happy to see us and to delegate responsibility. In fact, the commander asked me to stay on, but I had to try and find my family."



This was the situation in many towns and cities. Communists, Social Democrats, former trade unionists and other democratic-minded individuals joined in the effort to restore civilian life.

On May 8, Hitler's generals signed the unconditional surrender in Berlin-Karlshorst. Hitler and his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, had committed suicide on April 30, and a new fascist government under Admiral Karl Doenitz had been formed. Doenitz had called for continued fighting on the eastern front while starting negotiations for capitulation to the Anglo-American Allies, which took place in Reims on May 7. The Doenitz government was dissolved on May 23 because the Soviet Union protested its continued existence. Doenitz was subsequently tried and convicted in the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

Even at this time, when victory had barely been achieved, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill attempted to form a provisional government of German generals who would keep the Hitlerite troops together. This plan, too, had to be abandoned because of Soviet protests.

### Divergent goals of occupation powers

Germany was roughly divided into four zones, administered by United States, British, French and Soviet military authorities. The Soviet Zone – which later became the German Democratic Republic – comprised less than one-third of the territory and population. It was the industrially least developed part of the country, accounting for only 1.6 percent of the iron ore production and 7.7 percent of steel. It had no deep sea port, and its agricultural areas were not as fertile as those in the western parts of the country. The three Western occupation zones controlled 72 percent of all industrial production.

On May 14, Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Western allied forces in Europe, issued directive JCS 1067/8. It ordered the occupation forces to carry out denazification, decartelization, arrest of war criminals and control of the economy, all principles first projected at the Yalta Conference in early 1944 and later, in 1945, incorporated in the Potsdam Decisions on postwar Germany, agreed to by President Harry Truman, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. Subsequently France became a partner to the Potsdam Decisions.

However, Eisenhower's order also laid the basis for differentiated political development in the Western occupation zones. It delegated decisions regarding political activities to the three Western occupation authorities, thereby leaving the door open for circumventing the directive's provisions regarding denazification and decartelization. The Western occupation authorities promptly proceeded to dissolve the anti-fascist action committees and prohibit all political and trade-union activities.

Only in the Soviet occupation zone were anti-fascists encouraged. On June 10, the Soviet Military Administration of Germany (SMA) issued a decree permitting the foundation of anti-fascist, democratic political parties, public organizations and trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

Within a month, four political parties were established in the Soviet Zone: the Communist and Social Democratic parties, as those of the working class; the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), for religiously motivated people; and the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD), which recruited its membership from craftsmen, retail salesmen and intellectuals.

The day following the SMA order, on June 11, the Communist Party issued an appeal calling for the creation of an anti-fascist democratic Germany and the complete liquidation of the remnants of the Hitler regime. The Communists called for the unity of the work-



ing class and for the creation of a bloc of anti-fascist parties to fight against hunger, unemployment and homelessness, against excessive exploitation, and for democratic rights and freedoms and democratic self-government.

Steps to build a united working-class party were taken immediately. There was deep-rooted animosity between Communists and Social Democrats, dating from pre-Hitler times. It was based on the right-wing policies of the German Social Democrats since the eve of World War I, when they voted for war credits in the Reichstag, the German parliament. During the post-World War I period they had been deeply involved in conspiracies to defeat revolutionary uprisings of the German working class, paving the way for Hitler. They had rejected all Communist offers for a united front against fascism. Though Communists later criticized their own sectarian errors during the early 1930s, the main burden of the responsibility for permitting Hitler's rise lay with the Social Democrats.<sup>2</sup>

True, both Communists and Social Democrats had learned to overcome their differences during the underground struggles and in the concentration camps, but few of those involved had survived.

### Building working-class unity

To weld working-class unity a first joint meeting of the two parties took place on June 19, 1945 and a joint commission was elected to work out a program for a merger.

The first task was to convince the membership. "It was incredibly difficult," Grace Arnold, an expert on the international labor movement and lifelong teacher, told me. "I traveled through several states to discuss this with our membership [of the Communist Party]. We had

group and individual discussions. I'll never forget one old comrade. He had been through many struggles and had been in a concentration camp where a Social Democrat turned traitor. He was quite bitter about the merger plan. However, we were able to convince the majority of our comrades that it was necessary."

By April 1946, congresses of both parties were held to decide on unification and adopt a draft for the basis of this action.<sup>3</sup>

Since both congresses accepted the proposal, they then convened for a joint founding congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) on April 21-22. The program adopted there consisted of three parts.

Part one dealt with immediate demands. Its 14 points incorporated the decisions of the Potsdam Conference and outlined steps for an anti-fascist, democratic development. In addition to calling for punishment of all those responsible for the war and the cleansing of public life and all public agencies by removing all fascists and reactionaries, it demanded that all "capitalist monopolies and all enterprises of war criminals, fascists and those interested in war be transferred into the hands of self-administration."

It called for a democratic land reform, for democratic rights, including equality of all citizens "irrespective of race or sex. Equality for women in public life and on the job."

These 14 points advanced not a socialist program but one that would assure a complete break with the fascist past and the causes of fascism, and clear the road for an extension of democracy for the working class and its allies.

Part two dealt with "the struggle for socialism" and committed the SED to work toward the "transformation of capitalist ownership of the means of production into public ownership."

Part three dealt with the nature of the organization. The SED, it said, "currently has the goal of guiding the



working class in the direction of the struggle for socialism, to lead the working class and the entire working people in the fulfillment of this, its historic mission."

Meanwhile, with the active aid of the Soviet occupation authorities, a number of steps to break with the fascist past were proceeding.

In September 1945, conferences of peasants were held in all parts of the Soviet Zone, calling for expropriation of the large landed estates of more than 247 acres, and the distribution of their land among poor and landless peasants and repatriates from countries east of the Oder-Neisse postwar frontier. Appropriate laws were passed. Land commissions composed of over 50,000 peasants, farm workers and repatriates, aided by 25,000 industrial workers, distributed land to nearly 300,000 applicants during the next three months, and the government agencies offered credits for fertilizer and farm implements to the new farmers.

Immediately after the fascist surrender, steps were taken to cleanse the judiciary, the educational system and the state apparatus of all fascists. "To appreciate what a herculean task this was," Ms. Sindermann emphasized, "you must remember that Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) had 16 million members. We did not stop at removing war criminals. Every official who had served under the Nazis was subjected to a close scrutiny. Anyone found to agree with the Nazis' views was removed. We started training judges and educators in cram courses. It was preferable to have poorly trained officials with a democratic, anti-fascist orientation to those who were well-trained but who had served the fascists."

In this early period, Ms. Sindermann herself was a juror in a court dealing with those accused of crimes against humanity. "In these courts all the jurors had to be active anti-fascists. The judge, in our court, was a democrat of the pre-Hitler days."

While the laborious process of forming a new state, judicial and educational apparatus went on in the Soviet Zone, in 1946 and 1947 the reverse process took place in the three Western zones.

Known anti-fascists there were forced out of office and officials who had served the Nazi state were reinstated, under the guise of promoting efficiency.

An important milestone in the effort to eradicate the rule of monopoly capital and the financial interests who had backed fascism was the referendum held in Saxony on June 30, 1946.

In accordance with the Potsdam Decisions, all enterprises backing Hitler's war effort or belonging to Nazis had been put under trusteeships responsible to the occupation forces. The big question was what would become of them in the future.

Saxony was the most industrialized state in the Soviet Zone. It included the most important industries in that zone which had belonged to Hitler's backers. Therefore the three political parties – the SED, CDU and LDPD – together with the Free German Trade Unions proposed a referendum on a bill ordering expropriation of these industries without compensation.

The referendum was set up in such a way that all those of voting age would be eligible with the exception of former war criminals and Nazi functionaries. In this way, one third of one percent of the voters were disfranchised. Of the 3.7 million people eligible to vote, 93.7 percent cast their ballots and 82.4 percent of those endorsed the measure.

It is important to note that these were not the only elections which expressed the people's desire for a change in the ownership of basic industry. On December 1, 1946, 76 percent of the voters in Hesse (in the U.S. occupation zone) voted for a new state constitution and 71.9 percent for a measure to nationalize the mines, iron-steel- and energy-producing plants, and the banks. In



Nordrhein-Westphalia, in the British zone, voters on August 6, 1948 agreed to a law for the socialization of mines. In each of these cases, the occupation authorities interfered to counter the voters' decision and uphold capitalist interests in violation of democracy.<sup>4</sup>

### Drive to save Germany for capitalism

The drive of the three Western Allies to save Germany for capitalism was inexorable. It had been an undercurrent of U.S. policy throughout the war, and had emerged with the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the approaching victory over fascism.

Realizing the opportunity created by Roosevelt's death, Nazi Finance Minister Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk wrote to Hitler's Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, on April 14, 1945, two days after Roosevelt's death. He said that the death "removed a block implacably barring any contact with the Americans," and suggested that the good offices of the Pope be used "to explain to the Americans that a Soviet power strengthened by German productive capacity, production and industry would not be a trade partner but a competitor of great strength and danger. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Krosigk's hopes failed. The momentum of the Soviet and Allied offensive forced the German unconditional surrender three weeks later. But his idea of united action between the German bourgeoisie and the Western Allies became the dominant policy during the next few years.

A few facts will illustrate the drive to undermine the Potsdam Agreement and to prepare for the "roll-back" of the socialist camp.

In September 1946, the British and American military governments formed an economic unit of their occupation zones, in violation of the agreement. A year later, in September 1947, the Marshall Plan conference in Paris –

attended by 16 states – adopted a decision to incorporate the Western occupation zones into their planning. In February 1948, the Western occupation powers held a conference in London to discuss a joint policy toward Germany, a conference from which they excluded the Soviet Union but included the Benelux countries in violation of all postwar agreements. At that conference the decision was made to charge the minister-presidents of the West German *Laender* (states) with drafting a constitution for Germany.

In June 1948, the Western occupation powers instituted a separate currency reform, which they also extended to West Berlin, 110 miles inside the Soviet Zone.

In response to this provocation, Soviet authorities closed off the Western access routes to Berlin and offered to supply the city with all its needs. The West responded with the "air lift" during which hundreds of planes transported personnel and materials to the city – at times at the rate of 4,000 tons of material a day – rather than abide by the contractual provisions for the city. This brought Europe to the brink of war.

On April 8, 1949, the United States, Britain and France adopted an occupation statute for a West German state, to take force on September 21, 1949. On May 23, a constitution for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was adopted, tied to acceptance by the FRG of the occupation statute. On August 14, elections for the FRG parliament were held, and it constituted itself on September 7.

All this activity was summed up by John Foster Dulles in his book, *War without Peace*. German imperialism, he wrote, was to be "a trump card in the hands of the West. By incorporating East Germany into the sphere of influence of the West, an advanced strategic position can be won in Central Europe which can undermine Soviet Communist military and political positions in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and adjacent countries."<sup>6</sup>



### 3 The Russians Were Coming

Eisleben, population 30,000, is a copper mining town in the industrial district of Halle. For centuries the town's livelihood has depended on copper and since the turn of the century copper mining has meant Mansfeld. Today it is called "VEB Mansfeld Concern Wilhelm Pieck" – the name honors the country's first president and VEB stands for "People's Owned Enterprise."

The workers' movement was always strong in this district. The first workers' organization emerged in the mines in 1825, and in 1909 the first strike took place. In the wake of the October Revolution there were revolutionary uprisings in the area as well as in many other parts of Germany, and they were drowned in blood by the Social Democratic government.

The first direct contact of Mansfeld miners with the Soviet Union came in 1927, when a group of them addressed a letter to Soviet miners expressing their support for the Soviet efforts in building socialism. A response came from the Dzierzynski pit in Krivoi Rog. As a token of proletarian internationalism the Ukrainian miners sent the Mansfeld workers a flag depicting unity of the German and Soviet working people. It was a proud token for the Mansfeld workers, and when the Nazis established their terror regime it was hidden at great risk by a Communist couple and was saved.

Visitors to Eisleben can hardly miss the Lenin statue in the town's main square and the history of that monument illustrates the most salient factor in the history of Soviet-GDR relations. The story of the Lenin monument is quite dramatic.



After the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis, the advancing armies and their industrial backers started plundering the land. Part of this looting was conducted by a firm jointly owned by the Mansfeld concern and the Metal Company AG of Frankfurt/Main. They shipped huge quantities of metal, stolen in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, to the smelting ovens of German war industry. Railway cars filled with monuments, church bells, machines, coins and ornaments arrived for the Mansfeld furnaces early in 1943. It is interesting to note that one owner of the Frankfurt firm was Hermann Abs, a Nazi financier who later played an important role in the FRG's economy and became a member of its commission for atomic development.

In October 1943, receipts at the scrap yards included a bronze statue weighing nearly three tons. It was a statue of Lenin.

Soviet workers, brought to the district as forced laborers, recognized the statue and heaped other scrap metal on top to hide it. But as the Nazi advance was checked and the scrap heaps dwindled, new ways had to be found to hide the nine-foot high monument. German anti-fascists became involved in the effort.

On April 13, 1945 – while the Red Army was approaching Berlin – U.S. troops, coming from the West, occupied the town. Robert Buechner, a former miller, member of the Communist Party and active resistance fighter, describes the event in a volume of recollections of German anti-fascists active in that area:<sup>1</sup>

“On April 13, 1945, while the Americans moved in, our anti-fascist committee of Eisleben moved into city hall and established itself as a new, democratic self-government. We disarmed the police and kicked them out. Two workers, a Communist and a Social Democrat, undertook to set up a police force made up of reliable, class-conscious workers.

“These actions were of far-reaching importance because

they forced the Americans to recognize me as the mayor and – on my recommendation – appoint Comrade Otto Gotsche as county representative. This way we got the better of the bosses of the old Mansfeld concern who had determined the fate of the town for so long. As we discovered later, they had prepared a list of ‘non-Nazis’ for the occupation authorities from which to draw the new heads of the town and county administrations. . .”

Buechner then describes various efforts of the Mansfeld management to sabotage, corrupt and take over. He continues:

“Early in June, an organized witch hunt by Mansfeld managers against the Communist mayor was developed. At the time they made available to the ‘Amis’ [Americans] valuable government property hidden by the Nazis in the mines. Among these items was a mercury cache in the Pauls pit (worth at least 8 million marks at peacetime prices) and the irreplaceable stamp collection of the German Postal Museum.

“We made every effort to retain these and similar valuables for our people. However the ‘patriots’ of German monopoly capital now succeeded in getting the Amis to act against the town administration. Their first success was that the Mansfeld concern was put under jurisdiction of a higher command which made any further interference impossible for me.

“Meanwhile the first occupation officers had been replaced by a gang of American businessmen in uniform. The distribution of leaflets, conducted repeatedly, if without permission, during April and in preparation for May first, was now declared a criminal offense. The May Day celebration – prohibited by the Americans – was conducted in Eisleben as an open air meeting with the aid of Soviet friends and comrades among the forced laborers. . .”

He then describes how the Americans, when ordered to turn over the area to Soviet occupation forces on the



basis of allied agreements, attempted to remove large quantities of goods and valuable machine tools for the manufacture of precision instruments. When this became known red [warning] posters, signed by the mayor and the county representative, were put up prohibiting the shipment of machines and merchandise. Workers were told to refuse to load such goods, and police and volunteers were stationed at roads to confiscate such shipments.

As a result, on June 20, the American occupation authorities dismissed the mayor for "Communist activities" and threatened him with arrest. They nominated an employee of the Mansfeld concern in his place. However, the day before the Red Army arrived, Buechner was unanimously reelected by the town council, as the enlarged anti-fascist action committee was then called. He recalls:

"The Amis did not dare act against this democratic vote. In the two days before the Red Army arrived they fairly burst with fury. Within a few hours the Lenin monument was brought from its hiding place and set up. The town square and city hall were a mass of red flags. Comrade Otto Brosowski was fetched, with the flag of Krivoi Rog, to receive the Red Army in our old, honorable town hall. All this had been prepared illegally and with great care and it came off splendidly."

While this was by no means a typical reception for Soviet troops, the story serves to illustrate the class nature of the occupation. U.S. forces – with a few honorable exceptions – aided and abetted German capitalists, while Soviet authorities sought out anti-fascists as the force that could guarantee security from a repetition of the attack mounted by the Nazis. Soviet authorities had a real interest in carrying out the decisions of the Potsdam Conference that Germany must be denazified, decartelized and demilitarized.

## Soviet aim – security

Motives for the Soviet actions in their occupation zone were examined by D. F. Fleming in his book *The Cold War and Its Origins*, and Fleming cannot be remotely suspected of Communist sympathies. "Their [the Soviets] first and continuing motive was, and is, security," he wrote and went on to enumerate Soviet losses as totaled in statistics collected by a Soviet Extraordinary State Commission.<sup>2</sup>

Their survey showed that the Nazis and their allies had occupied Soviet territory in which 88 million people lived. They destroyed, completely or partially, 15 large cities, 1,710 towns and 70,000 villages. They burned or demolished 6 million buildings and deprived 25 million people of their shelter.

They demolished 31,850 industrial enterprises, 65,000 kilometers (40,000 miles) of railway tracks and 41,000 railway stations; 36,000 postal, telegraph and telephone offices; 56,000 miles of main highway; 90,000 bridges and 10,000 power stations. The Germans ruined 1,135 coal mines and 3,000 oil wells, carrying off to Germany 14,000 steam boilers, 1,400 turbines and 11,300 electric generators.

They slaughtered or carried off 7 million horses, 17 million cattle, 20 million hogs, 27 million sheep and goats and 110 million poultry. They looted and destroyed 40,000 hospitals and medical centers, 84,000 schools and colleges, and 43,000 public libraries with 110 million volumes. Some 44,000 theaters, 427 museums and 2,800 churches were destroyed.

The example of Eisleben perhaps makes acceptance of Soviet occupation by the defeated, demoralized and guilt-ridden Germans look easy. It was not. Anti-Soviet propaganda had been a tool of the German ruling circles since the October Revolution, and in the 12 years of the Hitler regime – during four of which the two countries



had been locked in deadly combat – anti-Soviet propaganda had been equaled only by anti-Communism and anti-Semitism.

When the war ended people were apprehensive of “the Russians” and fearful partly because they had a bad conscience and partly because the Nazis had spread all kinds of rumors about the “terrible things” these Russians were going to do. For this reason many people in the eastern part of the country left their homes and made their way to the Western occupation zones, where they expected greater leniency.

“But the people learned that Soviet policies were always in the interests of the working people and in support of anti-fascist elements,” Ms. Sindermann said.

The Soviet Military Administration for Germany (SMA) was formed on June 9, 1945. The following day it passed a decree permitting the formation of anti-fascist, democratic political parties, public organizations and trade unions. In the Western occupation zones, political activities were prohibited until August and September.

Within a short period, Soviet occupation authorities ordered the closing of capitalist banks and loan associations, and the organization of community finance and credit institutions; the provisional confiscation of property belonging to the state, the Nazi party, war criminals and active Nazis; the reorganization of the judicial system; the reopening of schools and their denazification; democratic land reform; the establishment of a democratic police force, and other measures to change the state structure built up by the fascists.

Many of these measures had been suggested by the anti-fascist political organizations. They were always implemented with their help.

Many people who were active in the effort to rebuild the country and reconstruct its people have favorite recollections of the democratic measures instituted by Soviet occupation authorities.

Anni Sindermann, sent to help rebuild the trade unions after her escape from Ravensbrueck concentration camp, vividly recalls Decree 253, which established equal pay for equal work for women. “I was working at a cardboard factory then,” she recalled. “Most of the workers were women and their wages were 17 to 23 pfennigs an hour while men made about 50 pfennigs. At the time, there were only two Communists at the plant, and I had been trying to recruit. Most of the women were skeptical. At one union meeting we discussed the question of equal wages and I said the SMA would act on the question. Some women told me that they would join the party if that became true. When it happened and my prediction had proven correct, 53 women joined.”

One charge frequently made in the West is that the Soviet Union “extracted” reparation from postwar Germany. In this connection another set of statistics is interesting. The war-related death toll in the Soviet Union was 20 million, or 10.4 percent of the prewar population; that in Germany 6 million or 8.8 percent; and that of the United States 503,000 or 0.4 percent. The material losses of the Soviet Union are put at \$ 128 billion or \$ 663 per capita of the prewar population. The only country showing higher material losses was the aggressor, Germany, with \$ 48 billion, a per capita of \$ 703.<sup>3</sup>

The question of reparations was discussed by the Allies at several stages of negotiations before the war ended. But the United States was reluctant. “The Russians craved reparations for the repair of their devastated land,” Fleming writes. “We had no devastation and too many new factories, if anything. . . We were reluctant to grant large credits to Russia for her reconstruction. . .”<sup>4</sup>

He reports that the Soviet Union was not getting the heavy industrial equipment requested under the fourth lend-lease protocol of June 1944, when the war was still raging, and writes: “The Russians were disturbed also by the lack of progress on their request for a \$6,000,000,000



postwar credit, to aid in their reconstruction. This request had been discussed for months, and always the Administration said it had no power from Congress to grant anything like this sum, but the Russians felt that nothing was being done to get the authority."

The Potsdam Agreement finally settled the question in this way: The Soviet Union was to receive its reparations from its occupation zone and would undertake to settle Poland's claims from its receipts. In addition the Soviet Union was to receive from the Western zones "15 percent of such usable and complete industrial capital equipment, in the first place from the metallurgical, chemical and machine manufacturing industries as is unnecessary for the German peace economy and should be removed from the Western zones of Germany, in exchange for an equivalent value of food, coal, potash, zinc, timber, clay products, petroleum products, and such other commodities as may be agreed upon," as well as 10 percent of the "unnecessary" capital equipment "without payment or exchange of any kind."

Claims of the Western Allies and other countries entitled to reparations were to be met from the Western zones.<sup>5</sup>

In accordance with this decision, Soviet occupation authorities marked capital goods which had belonged to monopoly enterprises, war criminals and the fascist state for dismantling and shipment to the Soviet Union. Among the materials shipped were rails and industrial equipment.<sup>6</sup> But the Soviet Union was also concerned with industrial recovery in its occupation zone. Therefore, on June 5, 1946, Soviet authorities started forming Soviet Stock Companies (SAG) at enterprises marked for dismantling. These firms, which formerly belonged to concerns like Krupp, I. G. Farben and other prominent backers of the Nazis, were responsible for 56.7 percent of the chemical and 44.1 percent of the energy production in that part of Germany.

SAG enterprises were to base their production on Soviet raw materials but to be subjected to German laws in their operation. The total share of SAG's in the Soviet Zone industrial production was 19.5 percent in 1947, and it rose to 22 percent in 1948.

### Workers become the managers

Production from these enterprises certainly helped make some restitution for the immeasurable losses sustained by the Soviet people. But they served another function, which was perhaps more important in the long run. They taught German workers to run their plants. A typical story about a SAG enterprise was told me by Henri Henrion, SAG appointed director of Siemens-Plania, now People's Owned Enterprise Electro-Carbon in Berlin.

Henrion, now a vigorous pensioner in his seventies and active in community affairs, was asked shortly after the SAG was founded in November 1946 by the Soviet officer in charge to join the plant as director. He had been a mechanic and qualified as an engineer in evening school. He was also a member of the Communist Party since 1928. He recalled:

"The plant had been heavily destroyed and some of the valuable machinery that was still intact had been earmarked for shipment to the Soviet Union. One of those items was a great 5,000 ton press. It had been dismantled and packed in 1946.

"When I was appointed, management was still made up of Siemens personnel. The task for the Soviet officer in charge was to build production, and he had hired me to help accomplish it. At the time, there were 850 workers in the plant and only 55 of them were Communists. The Siemens management people were dragging their feet and no progress was made.



"When I started, the Soviet director, a man named Semjonov, advised me that if I had problems to go and consult experienced workers. When I saw that management resisted efforts to increase production, I spoke to 10 or 12 workers and foremen who had been in the plant a long time. I asked their advice and invited them to a management meeting.

"They came, but I'll never forget the way they stood, just inside the boardroom, their caps in hand. One of the Siemens people asked what they wanted. 'I have asked them to join management,' I said and invited the workers to sit down. At that point all the Siemens men got up and walked out. Some of them resigned and some later came back, but the workers stayed. Their advice made it possible to chalk up marked improvements in production.

"Semjonov frequently walked through the halls and talked to workers. The Russians literally worked their way into the workers' hearts. The workers were much bothered by the thought of having the 5,000-ton press shipped out. Such a press is very important to production of that type. Early in 1947, Semjonov appealed to the Soviet authorities to leave the press at our plant. They agreed and it was set up again.

"At the time I started working there, we had set ourselves four main tasks. 1. To win the confidence of the workers and integrate them in management. 2. To improve living and working conditions. 3. To build the technological and organizational basis for fulfillment of production tasks. 4. The political and ideological education of the workers."

All these tasks went hand-in-hand, Henrion said. The first step, in the fall of 1946, was to offer the workers hot meals for which no ration cards were required. Gradually other benefits were added – a shoe shop, the first cafeteria, a tailor shop and a shop for hard-to-get consumer goods like cigarettes, liquor and quality foods.

This shop was for use by workers who had earned special coupons as rewards for good work which entitled them to buy there.

"Of course there were attempts at sabotage, and there was resistance to some of the Soviet measures. There were many struggles, but things kept improving. The Soviets kept demanding that we develop initiative. 'If you get a task and we help you, you must find ways of doing it,' Semjonov used to say."

Between 1950 and 1953, all SAG enterprises were turned over to the GDR government. "In many ways this presented new problems. As a SAG enterprise, we had never had to worry about raw materials. Now it was our problem," Henrion recalled. "For a while we got raw materials from the FRG and it was real junk. But we had learned to be the masters in our house." By that time the question of who held power in the former Soviet Zone, now the German Democratic Republic, had been decided in favor of the anti-fascist forces led by the working class.



## 4 Friend and Partner

Wherever I went during my five years in the GDR, fraternal relations with the Soviet Union and other members of the socialist community were evident.

Schoolchildren in my apartment house excitedly talked about letters received from Soviet pen pals. Many community organizations maintained contacts with groups and individuals in the Soviet Union. One example was the tenants' group at 70 I Karl Marx Allee in Berlin, to which I was introduced by a friend. A member of the group had found an old newspaper picture showing the site where their house now stands and a group of Red Army soldiers who had liberated it. They were able to trace one of the men in the picture and, after an exchange of letters, extended an invitation. The chairperson proudly showed me their album recording the visit of a Soviet war veteran and his family. It was a moving, unforgettable experience for all concerned and the contact was maintained.

I met many people who had visited the Soviet Union on "Friendship trains." Such trains take large delegations to destinations in the Soviet Union where they are hosted by partner groups in communities and plants. At the Mansfeld copper mines I was told that, since the mid-sixties, the best workers are awarded trips on "Friendship trains" for which they get time off with pay. By the end of 1978, 11,000 of the 40,000 Mansfeld workers and employees had visited the Soviet Union that way.

Heinz Joswig, at a cooperative farm in Dorf Mecklenburg, was a devout Catholic, not a particularly progres-



sive man, who headed up a pig-breeding team. When his co-workers asked him to join the German-Soviet Friendship Society he refused, saying he "had no time for politics." A year later he asked to join, because he had been impressed with the volunteer work of Soviet soldiers from a nearby garrison during harvest time.

Joswig is now one of 5.5 million members of Friendship Society, which has come a long way since 1947 when German anti-fascists set out to build a Society for the Study of Soviet Culture. Among the group's initiators were such illustrious personalities as Anna Seghers, author of the great anti-fascist novel *The Seventh Cross*, and the Marxist economist Juergen Kuczynski. At its inception, the society had a membership of 2,200. By 1949 it had grown to 100,000, and the basis had been laid to convert it into the German-Soviet Friendship Society. Today the organization's efforts are sustained by nearly 600,000 elected volunteer functionaries and are financed by small monthly dues. Activities include lectures, meetings, competitions, film showings and discussions, as well as many delegations.

These activities are facilitated by 23 Houses of German-Soviet Friendship in the major cities and 1,257 German-Soviet Friendship Centers in factories, schools and clubhouses. An important aspect of these efforts is that they involve all sections of the population. The breadth of the movement is shown by the fact that the chairpersons of the four non-Communist political parties are on the DSF national executive board.

Perhaps the most decisive aspect of DSF membership is that 1.8 million belong to about 90,000 workers' teams who have won the title of "Brigade of German-Soviet Friendship." To gain it, the team has to make and fulfill a plan of educational and cultural activities to deepen the understanding and friendship between the two countries. These activities are examined by a commission, and the title has to be defended every year. Unlike the title

"Brigade of Socialist Labor," it carries no material reward.

At Berlin's Television Electronics Plant team leader Siegfried Seibt told me about the work of his 23-member Maxim Gorky brigade. They work on the final process in making diodes. In 1971, members of this team decided to establish direct contact with workers of the same industry in the Soviet Union. After some preparatory work two team members went to Moscow on a Friendship train in 1972 and met with a team at the Moscow Vacuum Technology Plant. They exchanged views and started corresponding, and eventually concluded their first friendship agreement with the Volkenskaya brigade.

By applying a method of economizing on materials introduced by Galina Arefjeva at the Moscow plant, the Gorky brigade was able to save material for 4.5 days' production. Their example caught on. Within five years of this first visit the two plants had established close fraternal relations. Increased production achieved through the Arefjeva method raised the plant's income by 6 million marks annually. Regular visits of workers and technicians of the two plants have produced many material benefits as well as close personal relations. There are many plants that have similar relations with partner plants in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries, and the exchanges also embrace cultural and scientific institutions. These efforts have effected personal friendly encounters of millions of citizens of the countries concerned.

These are manifestations of a new type of international relations known as socialist integration. Lenin predicted this development in 1913 when he wrote that "...already under capitalism, all economic, political and spiritual life is becoming more and more international. Socialism will make it completely international."<sup>1</sup>

This need for integration in modern society is based on the requirements of the scientific and technological



progress commonly referred to as the scientific-technological revolution. Large-scale research, vast investments and production are required, and they exceed in scope capabilities of most nations.

Capitalism attempts to solve this problem by such structures as the European Economic Community (EEC) founded as a "Common Market" for its member states.<sup>2</sup> But it is fettered by the competitive drive of multi-nationals for markets and profits.

The chief instrument of socialist economic integration, which is the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA),<sup>3</sup> states its goals in Article I of its statutes as an effort to contribute "...to the constant improvement in the welfare of the population of the member states..." through the "unification and coordination of the efforts of all member states...through planned development of the economies and the acceleration of economic and technological progress in these countries..."

## New deal in international trade

The notable success of this alliance and its advantages for all member countries can easily be demonstrated. The level of industrial development in CMEA countries was considerably below that of the developed industrial countries of Western Europe at the end of the World War II, but since then CMEA countries have enjoyed a much faster growth. For example, between 1950 and 1978, the national income in Common Market countries increased 3.1-fold and their industrial production 3.6-fold. During the same period the national income of CMEA countries increased 7.6-fold and their industrial production 12-fold. This has led to a significant shift in the distribution of the world's industrial production. In the 15 years between 1950 and 1975, the share of the CMEA countries rose from 17.8 to 34 percent, while

that of the developed capitalist countries, the United States included, declined from 67 to 52 percent.

What about the charge that CMEA is dominated by the Soviet Union? A group of students at the "Bruno Leuschner" Institute of Economics worked out a pamphlet on the impact of CMEA membership on the GDR economy.

They enumerated the Soviet Union's place among CMEA countries. It has

- two-thirds of the population,
- 70 percent of the national income,
- about 75 percent of the industrial production,
- about 60 percent of the agricultural production,
- about 80 percent of all investments,
- about 35 percent of the foreign trade,
- two-thirds of all investments in scientific research,
- the greatest share of the energy and raw material resources.

From the time the CMEA was established, the Soviet Union has been the main trade partner of all the other member countries. Its share of the GDR's foreign trade in the years from 1949 to 1977 averaged 38.6 percent.

The students also pointed out that all countries profited from Soviet research and development, because the agreement provides that scientific and technical data be interchanged free of charge. "Since 25 percent of the world's scientists live in the Soviet Union," the pamphlet says, "the USSR commands an exceptional scientific potential. It has given all CMEA partners extensive scientific-technological aid. From 1949 to 1971 the Soviet Union made available to other member states about 78,000 processes free of charge, and received 24,000. The value of data furnished by the Soviet Union amounted to 9 to 12.5 billion rubles, that of those received from 1.5 to 2 billion rubles."

Dr. Gerhard Weiss, deputy chairperson of the GDR Council of Ministers and his country's permanent repre-



sentative to the CMEA, pointed out the advantages that this cooperation has brought to his country in an article in the newsweekly *Horizont*. "Membership in CMEA was a basic condition for the development of a socialist people's economy in the GDR," Dr. Weiss wrote. The founding of the council was based not only on the necessity to offer mutual aid in overcoming the devastation of the war and to jointly rebuff the boycott and blackmail pressures of the imperialist powers, but also on the recognition that "the development of socialism on a world scale must lead to the creation of a community of socialist countries and to an increasingly close cooperation in all phases of social life."<sup>4</sup>

The need for mutual aid in the postwar period was a particularly urgent necessity for the GDR. Even before the separate German states were founded, the West tried economic blackmail on the Soviet Zone. Repeatedly they reneged on trade agreements, and repeatedly the Soviet Union and other members of the socialist community came to its aid. In February 1950 – when the FRG embargoed steel deliveries to the GDR – the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia increased their sales of fuel, steel and iron ore to the GDR. By 1954, vital imports of raw materials were provided almost entirely by CMEA partners, e. g. 99.6 percent of the GDR's anthracite coal needs, 92 percent of the coke imports, 99.4 percent of the iron ore, 95 percent of the cotton and 84 percent of the wool.

With the development of the CMEA, Dr. Weiss wrote, "the structure of the GDR economy was and is increasingly determined by the planned international division of labor."

I remember when the beginning of that division of labor was made. In 1960, I attended a free-wheeling youth forum in Jena. Officials from the city administration, the trade unions, the Free German Youth and the media answered questions from the audience. There were numerous acrimonious questions about the planned phas-

ing out of the GDR's tiny airplane industry. It was carefully explained that it would be more economical to produce washing machines or railroad cars in large quantities for the domestic market and for export, and to import planes. Though the argument was persuasive, a number of the young people registered objections. To them it was a matter of national pride to have an airplane industry.

Today the international division of labor is widely accepted, and people are conscious of the fact that the CMEA offers a secure and long-range market. Occasional problems arise – when a partner defaults on delivery, or when a bottleneck develops. This has been especially true for spare parts, and people grumble about shortages of mufflers or windshield wipers, or about the slow delivery of deepfreezers, but I never heard anyone say that the CMEA is not viable.

Since the beginning of specialization, integration projects have become greater in scope. There are many joint, bilateral or multilateral projects, and long-range planning and coordination of the economic plans of member countries has developed. Five areas have been singled out for long-range cooperation – raw material, including fuel and energy; machine building; agriculture and food products; industrial consumer goods; and transport.

One of the projects relating to fuel was the construction of a 1,520 mile natural gas pipeline from Orenburg on the Ural to the participating countries – the GDR, Poland, CSSR, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. The agreement was that the first five countries would each build a section of the pipeline, while the USSR would undertake extraction, conversion and transport and Romania would furnish installations.

The GDR government assigned responsibility for its share of the project to the Free German Youth. Young workers from all parts of the country volunteered to go to the building site in the Ukraine and work there under



pioneering conditions. While the pay was good, this was not the main attraction for most of the workers. There was a sense of adventure, the conquering of a new frontier. Werner Stuckert, a highway construction worker from Magdeburg, went because "there are many new opportunities and you have a chance to see and learn a lot," and Annemarie Mroncz, a civil engineer from Potsdam, said, "I look at it as an investment in my future. Not only will it ensure energy supplies for our country, but we will also meet young people from the Soviet Union and other countries."

Such joint ventures are increasing and all these projects are based on voluntary participation on the basis of equality and the noninterference in the internal affairs of any member country.

The Western media have made much of the fact that raw materials for prices from the Soviet Union have increased. It is true that with the enormous increase in the cost of raw materials on the world market, the CMEA had to find a new pricing formula, and the Soviet Union is CMEA's largest supplier of raw materials. On the basis of this formula the price of crude oil and natural gas sold by the Soviet Union to its CMEA partners in the years 1976 through 1980 were 30 to 40 percent below world market prices.

In addition to the economic advantages and the large-scale people-to-people contact, socialist integration also extends to the Warsaw Pact,<sup>5</sup> the mutual defense alliance whose member states coordinate their foreign policy through a Political Consultative Committee.

These factors explain why the attitude in some of the CMEA countries toward the Soviet Union has changed in the postwar period to a feeling predominantly of friendship. Many of the young people I questioned on this problem defined their attitude by saying, "Without the Soviet Union, we would never have accomplished what we did."

## 5 Coalitions and Grass Roots Movements

Erfurt Mayor Heinz Scheinpflug, Rudolph Wagner, head of Erfurt Community Council 138, Rotraud Scheer-Schmidt, chairperson of the city council's standing Commission on Public Education, and Helmut Wolf, deputy secretary of the Erfurt National Front, are all part of a great effort to make socialist democracy work.

Erfurt is a district seat with a population of 206,000 and – as Mayor Scheinpflug reported with considerable pride – 24,000 Erfurters of voting age (18 years and over) participate in some phase of community life. They are the elected, unpaid members of the National Front; the parents' councils in the schools; consumer boards in supermarkets, department stores and shopping centers; members of civil grievance commissions, volunteer fire brigades and so on.

The city council, the mayor said, consists of 200 elected deputies only 12 of whom are full-time officials, heading city departments. All others hold regular jobs but are given time off with pay to fulfill their duties as deputies. These duties, besides attending regular city council meetings, consist of membership in standing commissions, which make policy for the various city departments, such as housing, transport, health and welfare, culture and other municipal concerns.

Half of the deputies, Scheinpflug said, work at local plants and therefore "reflect the interests of the workers and the opinions of the plants on municipal affairs." The deputies include representatives of all five political parties and the important mass organizations, so that all sections of the population have a say in city affairs.



While today this is a generally accepted structure for community and electoral affairs, it was not always so. It took years to overcome the people's distrust of the state and its officialdom, which had harassed and intimidated the common people for as long as anyone could remember – under the rule of monarchs, the bourgeois Weimar republic and the brutal Hitler regime. Therefore the broad popular participation in public affairs, which is typical for the entire country, is something of which Mayor Scheinplug is justly proud. An important aspect of this new relationship to the state is the fact that most "politicians," on all levels, are not full-time functionaries but citizens who combine their political duties with their jobs and thus are always close to the needs of the population.

To check this involvement of workers in political and social affairs, I made it a practice when interviewing workers in their plants to ask if they served the community in any way. The great majority, I found, did participate, and their activities ranged from sponsorship of a class of schoolchildren to being a deputy in the national parliament.

The basis for this new relationship was discussed by Albert Norden, member of the Politbureau of the SED, in a lecture to party functionaries. Norden, incidentally, had to flee Hitler Germany because he was a Communist journalist and a Jew, and he spent the war years in the United States as a shopworker in the electrical industry.

"The nature of capitalism is the insurmountable chasm between economics and social policy," Norden said in his speech. "It was left to socialism to create the unity of economic and social policy in the interests of the working people and to elevate it to its permanent and guiding principle. What the people produce is the people's property. The people, and the people alone, are the beneficiaries of their labor. That is and remains the essence of the socialist revolution."<sup>1</sup> Expanding on this theme, he

said, "In the entire recorded history, the chief classes of society stood opposed as antagonistic forces – slaves and slaveowners, feudal lords and serfs, proletarians and capitalists. Socialism does away with all class antagonism for the first time and forever."<sup>2</sup>

While, as Norden pointed out, the interests of the individual and the community are identical under socialism the process of demonstrating this to people and obtaining the maximum benefit from this new relationship is long and laborious, as are all processes involving changes in popular attitudes.

The important role of the National Front in this struggle was incorporated in the GDR Constitution, which decrees in Article 3:

1) The alliance of all forces of the people finds its organized expression in the National Front of the German Democratic Republic.

2) In the National Front of the German Democratic Republic, the political parties and mass organizations pool all forces of the people for joint action for the development of socialist society. They thereby implement the mutual relationship of all citizens in socialist society on the principle that each bears responsibility for the whole.

### Community councils with muscle

On the grass-roots level, this principle was demonstrated by Rudolph Wagner, a middle-aged man, member of the SED and chairperson of Erfurt's Community Council 138. Wagner works as an economist at the pharmaceutical firm, VEB Jenapharm. He has been chairperson of the Community Council since 1968 and knows practically all 2,000-plus inhabitants of his realm. They come to him with problems ranging from insufficient street-lighting to needed house repairs, demand his attention when



a playground needs refurbishing or a retiree is no longer able to manage for himself. Wagner is not necessarily the one who can affect the change, but he and his council know the proper place to get help.

The Erfurt Community Council 138 is not a membership organization but a committee in which all local organizations are represented and which relies on community participation. In his council are represented the SED community group, the Democratic Women's Federation, and People's Solidarity, a senior citizens support and self-help group. The other political parties happen not to have local groups in the community, otherwise they would also be represented. In addition, the council relies heavily on the representatives of the 25 tenants' groups in the district.

And just to assure myself that Community Council 138 was not a show-case organization I referred to the notes of my conversation with Mayor Scheinpflug and found that there are 2,800 elected officials of the National Front and 5,200 tenants' representatives in the town.

The community, Wagner said, consists of about 100 older eight-family apartment houses, some private houses, several small plants, a high school for 1,400 students, a Post Office vocational school with a student dormitory, shops, bars, children's institutions, and the Jenapharm branch where he works.

Once a year, a general membership meeting for all Council 138 residents is held, and in the interim the council holds monthly meetings open to the public, to discuss community problems and plan activities.

The community council does not limit itself to work on citizens' requests. It also receives directives from the National Front on planned projects, especially around elections and concerted national drives, such as special holidays or semiannual community cleanup drives.

In addition, the council goes looking for tasks. Semi-annually it arranges inspection tours of the community

to see what improvements might be needed that could be undertaken in the next period. These inspection tours are usually attended by members of the borough and city councils, and the reports are carefully considered for future activities.

One deputy to the borough council, who lives in the community, is a regular member of the community council, and also acts as their spokesperson in the legislature. Elected officials also participate in regular community forums, always those who are expert in the area under discussion.

One of those experts is Rotraud Scheer-Schmidt, chairperson of the city council's Commission of Public Education. She is an educator herself, and so are four others of her 14-member commission. Of the nine remaining, one is a full-time city council staff member in charge of public education and the others are workers, librarians, and trade-union officials, all of whom have a special interest in that field. The commission members not only work closely with the electorate but also with plants, to assure that contact is maintained between schools and the working class. One method used to accomplish this is the sponsorship of school classes by labor teams. They meet with the children several times a year to introduce them to the work in a plant, take them on excursions, celebrate their promotion to a new grade and generally acquaint them with the life of the working people.

Another important partner for Community Council 138 are the city and borough committees of the National Front. Helmut Wolf, a man in his thirties and a member of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD), is one of its full-time functionaries, a deputy secretary of the city committee. Before his election to this full-time office in 1977, he was safety inspector for building construction.

Among Wolf's duties is the organization of the volunteer community improvement competition called "Work



Along" (*Mach mit*). In this effort, communities make improvements above those which the economic plan and municipal capacity can provide. "We have a number of ongoing projects of this kind," Wolf said, "and they can be successful only to the extent to which they meet community interests. Twice a year – in the spring and in the fall – we have a cleanup campaign to care for planted areas, and sometimes we refurbish playgrounds or nursery schools. Then we encourage tenant groups to build community rooms in apartment-house basements. We also have a system of home-repair tool depots, where people can borrow tools and get do-it-yourself advice." The latter is particularly important, because there is a shortage of such services frequently involving long waiting periods.

In Community 138, in one year the "Work Along" effort accomplished the renovation of four pensioners' apartments, the building of six community rooms, and the refurbishing of a playground which had been built through such a community effort several years earlier.

In some instances, especially in small towns and villages, the results of the "Work Along" effort are spectacular.

In Bischheim-Haeslich (population 2,000) for example, there was great dismay when 25 additional nursery school places which had been promised were not available when the school year started. The community had undertaken to build a sports facility for the county and had no capacity left for the nursery. The concerned mothers did not sit home to grumble. They besieged the mayor and the village council. The harassed officials turned to the local National Front for help. Within two months, an old building adjacent to the existing nursery school had been remodeled and furnished by volunteers, with financial and material aid from a cooperative farm and some local industries.

In a village 15 miles from Erfurt, Wolf reported, the

inhabitants built a swimming pool with volunteer labor and with materials provided by the state.

Every year the 100 best communities are awarded prizes for their accomplishment and a public accounting is made – on local and national levels – of what the population has gained through these community efforts. This brings into sharper focus the benefits of the National Front to the community and, Wolf says, "raises community consciousness."

## Nominating neighbors

All these activities are the soil for the National Front's electoral activities. Nominations for public office are made in plants and communities, "where people know one another." These recommendations are then put together by the National Front in a proposed slate with special attention to guarantee representation of all political parties and mass organizations. In fact in elections for the *Volkskammer* – the national parliament – a fixed number of seats is allotted to each party and mass organization, irrespective of its numerical strength. (See Chapter 6.)

The proposed slates are then put before a nominating meeting, to which all voters are invited. At this meeting, nominating speeches are made, explaining the qualifications of each nominee; while the nominations are usually approved, occasionally they are not. After this broad process of selection, voters still have an opportunity to reject a candidate at the polls by striking out his or her name. There are always more candidates than posts, and normally those not elected are considered alternates. In case an elected deputy drops out during the term, the alternate with the highest number of votes takes his or her place.

It is now more than a generation since this election



process started and it works well, but it was not always like that.

In the postwar days of struggle for an anti-fascist, democratic state, many clashes occurred between the working class party and its partners in the Anti-Fascist Democratic Bloc. Right from the beginning, pro-capitalist forces in the Christian Democratic Union and the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany, which had been founded within two months of the victory over fascism, sought to introduce a "free economy," raising such false alternatives as "Christianity versus Marxism-Atheism," or attacking working-class power with the worn notion of "class neutrality of the state." (The German Peasant Party (DBD) and the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) were not founded until 1948.)

The SED combated the reactionary efforts by appealing to the progressive elements in both parties to work jointly against imperialism and militarism and succeeded in formulating a joint election appeal by the three parties on that basis.

In the first municipal and state elections in the fall of 1946, the SED received the largest vote, a clear mandate of the majority of the population for an anti-fascist, democratic course.

The *Short History of the SED* recounted these efforts and drew this conclusion:

"The SED showed that there is no democracy which stands above the classes and that the struggle for realization of democracy is conducted for the people. In this connection the party raised the understanding of the basic contradiction between formal democracy and real anti-imperialist democracy. The creation of anti-fascist, democratic conditions, it showed, is predicated on the political and economic disqualification of imperialism and the new state will embody the power of the working people led by the working class."<sup>3</sup>

## Pluralism socialist style

The practical view of this struggle was brought home to me in an interview with Gerald Goetting, chairperson of the Christian Democratic Union and deputy chairperson of the GDR State Council. Goetting, who prides himself on his friendships with the late Albert Schweitzer and Martin Luther King, Jr., is prominent in international Christian circles.

He recalls that as a student his opposition to fascism was aroused when his grandfather was expelled from the university for his anti-fascist attitudes. At the war's end he joined the CDU as well as the Free German Youth. "We had long hot discussions about our party's future," he recalled. "There were strong pressures for an anti-Communist position from some of the older leadership, especially those in the Western occupation zones. I tended to those who felt that the ethical tenets of Christianity imposed on us the responsibility to fight for a just society. We had to throw old notions overboard and find new relations for Christians." These considerations, he said, led the dominant forces of his party to view socialism as a "historically necessary, morally viable and scientifically founded alternative to capitalism, its exploitation, its wars and colonial policies."

With satisfaction, Goetting enumerated the CDU members who actively take part in shaping GDR policy. Among them are two members of the presidium of the People's Chamber; the Minister of Postal and Telecommunications, who is also a deputy chairperson of the GDR Council of Ministers; the President of the GDR Supreme Court; and a Supreme Court judge. The CDU is also represented on each of the 15 People's Chamber commissions, holds the chairmanship of one and deputy chairmanship in eight; 30 CDU members are in the national council of the National Front, four of them members of its presidium. The CDU has members on the



executive boards of all important mass organizations and 1,500 of its members are managers of industrial and agricultural enterprises. About 3,600 hold trade-union offices. Every fifth CDU member, Goetting said, holds some elected office. He mentioned with special pride the extensive work of the CDU in the German-Soviet Friendship Society, where it not only has 12 seats on the executive board, but engages in extensive contact with Soviet religious organizations.

To my surprise he said also that the CDU has three members in the national executive board of the Free German Youth, a possibility that had not occurred to me. This reflects membership of many Christian young people in that organization.

A similar picture emerges for the other political parties. Each has its own daily papers – altogether 18, with a daily circulation of 740,000, which is about twice their combined membership. Each party has its own buildings, including recreational facilities, publishing houses, printing presses, and training facilities for its functionaries.

Some people, even in the GDR, sometimes ask if this coalition effort is still necessary, especially since these parties are numerically small and all of them work for socialism. The foregoing should be an indication of their continued need. At any rate, the SED takes a firm stand for their continued existence.

A new SED program was adopted at the Ninth Congress in 1976. The new program was needed because socialism had been firmly established and was about to enter a new phase – the building of an advanced socialist society. This program states that, based on the socialist mode of production, the social structure of society has changed, exploitation has been routed and class antagonisms have disappeared. Thanks to the determined coalition policy of the SED, close and friendly relations and cooperation between the working class and all other sections of the population have been established. How-

ever, the program states: "The social rapprochement of classes and population sections is a historically determined, important and long-range process,"<sup>4</sup> which serves perfecting socialist democracy.

The program then defines the role of the National Front. "As a socialist peoples' movement, the National Front makes an important contribution to the rapprochement of classes and groupings based on the ideals of the working class. It develops close community relations in the neighborhoods of the cities and communities. Its mass political work is an important condition for the steady development of working and living conditions of the population and the beautification of cities and communities as well as for a many-sided cultural life."<sup>5</sup>

But these are abstract terms; concrete figures are perhaps more striking. Of the 335,000 members of 17,000 National Front Committees, 120,000 belong to no political party. Over 200,000 citizens are deputies to the People's Chamber and local legislative bodies, whose work is supported by 500,000 people participating in standing commissions and committees of local legislatures; 300,000 are active in the advisory councils of stores and catering establishments; 677,000 take part in parent advisory committees of public schools. More than 320,000 citizens take part in various forms of judicial activities.

The SED program sums this up by saying: "Participation by the citizens in its manifold forms in the rule of the state and the economy increasingly becomes a determining factor in the life of socialism."<sup>6</sup>



## 6 Anatomy of a Law

The charge is often made that socialist parliaments are "rubber stamps" and their activity no expression of democracy. To find the truth, I examined the course of a law through the People's Chamber, the GDR's parliament.

I picked the labor code of June 16, 1977, adopted after only a few hours' discussion, in which only 16 of the 500 deputies took the floor. First Deputy Harry Tisch, chairperson of the Federation of Free German Trade Unions (FDGB) executive board, introduced the measure and called for its adoption. Then seven deputies reported the findings of the Chamber's standing commissions, and eight spoke for the political parties and mass organizations which, along with the FDGB, have parliamentary caucuses. All speakers – five of them women – favored adoption of the labor codes. Their approaches differed, but all supported the measure as being in the interest of the section of society they represent.

Speaking for the Christian Democratic Union, for example, Dr. Harald Neumann said that "one of the basic principles of Christianity is to work in the public interest. In socialism, public interest brings individual effort into a proper relation to society. In this process, work molds the personality by serving community interests."

The measure was adopted unanimously and this might have seemed to substantiate the "rubber stamp" charge. But investigation showed that this vote was but the last act in a long process, in which more people were consulted and more proposals given serious consideration than is ever the case in any bourgeois parliament.



To find out about the process I went to see Rosel Walther, a deputy and prominent member of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD), Dr. Walter Hantsche, deputy director of the FDGB's legal department and a Brigade of Socialist Labor, and a chief steward.

Dr. Hantsche was the first person I talked to because the law had been initiated by the unions, which occupy a special position in relation to legislative action.

While Dr. Hantsche is not himself a deputy, he was a key figure in the development of the measure, shepherding it, from its inception, through the People's Chamber and assuring its proper application.

The GDR Constitution provides, in relation to legislative initiatives, in Article 65 that "bills may be presented by deputies of the political parties and mass organizations represented in the People's Chamber, the committees of the People's Chamber, the Council of State, the Council of Ministers and the Confederation of Free German Trade Unions." The unions' legislative rights are further emphasized in Article 45, which deals with trade-union rights and which states in Section 2: "The trade unions play an active role in shaping the socialist rule of law. They have the right to initiate legislation and to exercise social control in safeguarding the legally guaranteed rights of the working people."

This was surprising. After all, the unions have a 68-member parliamentary caucus among the 500 deputies and therefore their right to initiate legislation is apparent. I asked Deputy Walther why union rights are stressed in this way.

"They have a membership of 8.3 million," she said. "With a population of 17 million, the greater part of the voting-age population is organized there. It is our largest mass organization and cuts across all party lines. Our constitution provides that all political power is exercised by the working people, and for this reason unions are given this special consideration in the constitution."

The need for the new law, Dr. Hantsche says, grew out of the increasing leadership role of the working class in the country's economy and the many new social achievements. This had been pointed out by Tisch, speaking before the chamber. "The socialist consciousness of the working class has increased," he said. "This becomes evident in their extensive participation in the leadership and planning of public affairs."

The need for the new law had been projected as early as 1971 as a result of the decisions of the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party, which outlined perspectives for broad increases in social measures combined with greater workers' participation in managerial decisions. The previous, 1961, code had been variously amended, and numerous decrees had been passed on specific issues. This, Dr. Hantsche says, "made it increasingly difficult for the workers to be conversant with their rights."

"Our task was to formulate a law that would include all laws and regulations pertaining to labor, incorporating regulations governing the new social legislation and the managerial tasks confronting unions. The law also had to provide for new developments in the foreseeable future. In addition, and very importantly, the whole thing had to be so readable that every worker could use it as a handbook."

The first step was to make an analysis of the existing laws. For this purpose, extensive research was needed – among workers as well as management, and state organs. "We did the initial research in several hundred plants. Special emphasis was put on talking to union officials on the plant level, especially those in conflict commissions<sup>1</sup> and welfare functions at the point of production. Thousands of our members participated in this job."

At the same time, industrial ministries and pertinent commissions of the People's Chamber – for example those concerned with law, labor and social welfare –



made their own surveys. When this preliminary work had been completed, a joint commission of the People's Chamber, the FDGB and the Council of Ministers was set up. It was headed by Horst Heintze, a member of the FDGB's parliamentary caucus and of the People's Chamber presidium. Also on this commission were representatives of all FDGB unions, members of the affected ministries, and representatives of the Supreme Court.

This commission, "faced with a herculean task," Hantsche says, established subcommittees for each of the proposed law's 17 chapters. These subcommittees consisted of 10 to 15 people from the People's Chamber, the unions, and expert groups. All were given the preliminary research material. These subcommittees then worked out and submitted to the central working group their proposals for all the chapters of the law. Some proposed not one version but variations. In some cases, new appropriations were involved, which had to be considered carefully and discussed with the planning authorities. "For example, compensation in the case of industrial accidents and work-related sickness was increased to 100 percent of the average wage. It was the most expensive item and will cost about 85 million marks a year. Obviously one has to be assured of the necessary funds for such expenditures."

By the beginning of 1977, Dr. Hantsche says, the draft was "sufficiently qualified" to be submitted for public discussion. This took place during the first months of the year in the unions, political parties and mass organizations. "Concurrently, we had a broad media campaign to acquaint the public with the draft. Before the discussions in the shop were started, we conducted classes for shop stewards and other union officials to explain the draft."

## Reducing the work week

To find out how the discussion was carried out, I visited a labor team of a People's Owned Bakery in Berlin. Four men and a woman met me in their recreation room after their shift. Their team of 24 works in two shifts, baking rolls. They told me that all team members are in the union, none is a Communist, but all are members of the Soviet-German Friendship organization.

"We discussed the draft at three union meetings," chairperson Manfred Zimmermann explained. "Union meetings are held once a month. We tried to get people to read the draft beforehand, but not everyone did. At the meeting, we discussed the purposes of the law and we talked in detail about the provisions that affect conditions in our plant. We took minutes of all the meetings and passed them on to the plant's central trade-union committee."

"We also made a proposal," the woman worker said. "The new law provides for improvements for three-shift workers. They get a shorter workday and three extra days vacation. It is true that here we work only two shifts, night and morning. After all it's no use baking fresh rolls in the afternoon or evening. But we think our shifts are just as hard as the three shifts and we should be entitled to the same advantages."

They did receive a reply. It said that there had been numerous proposals in this direction, and while it would be impossible to implement immediately, the question would be reconsidered in 1979.

At the VEB Mansfeld Concern - which engages in copper mining, smelting and fabricating - chief steward Manfred Goehling told me that the labor code had been discussed in various forms over an entire year. "There were 1,400 suggestions. They covered nearly everything from birth to death. The most important discussions were around the conduct of socialist competitions and the



question of work discipline. Since the law goes very far in the question of the right to work, there was a strongly expressed view it should also be more specific about the responsibility of the individual worker to the collective.

"Quite a few proposals wanted to specify ways to curb absenteeism. There was a lot of discussion about this point. Obviously when one worker takes off time, others have to make up for him, and the feeling that the law should concern itself with this question was quite strong. However, after much discussion, we concluded that this question should not be legislated, that it is a matter for socialist education and the burden must be with the collectives." It must be added that the time off with pay granted by law would boggle the minds of most U. S. workers.

Time off with pay is granted by law in the following instances:

a) Annual vacations (Labor Code § 189-200). At present there is a legal minimum of 18 working days to 24 working days according to length of service or as specified in the union contract.

b) For conduct of social or political activities if not possible outside working hours (L. C. § 182).

c) For medical examination or treatment related to job or perusal of citizens' duty (L. C. § 183).

d) To get married or confinement of wife one day; to move household one or two days; to attend to medical care for handicapped or invalid members of household; in the case of death in the family two days; in case presence in court of law or an investigating commission is required but not when person involved as defendant in criminal proceeding (L. C. § 184).

e) For working married women, women with children under 18 years of age, women 40 years or more receive, monthly, one day off with pay to attend to household matters. This household day is also granted working fathers with children under 18 years (L. C. § 185).

f) Time off without pay is granted when children are certified as being sick, but single parents receive compensation as if they were sick themselves (L. C. § 187).

There are also many regulations governing the time-off with pay granted to workers engaged in improving their qualifications.

I was told that many proposals dealt with questions of hours and fringe benefits. Overall, 5.8 of the 8.3 million union members participated in the discussion. They wrote 147,806 letters, containing 39,533 suggestions for changes and amendments. After duplications had been weeded out and letters dealing with plant or industry-wide problems had been referred to the proper authorities, 90 substantive and 144 editorial changes were made in the draft to incorporate the views expressed. A special commission was assigned the task of replying to all letters received.

By mid-May, the law's final draft was put before the FDGB congress, approved and sent to the People's Chamber with a recommendation to adopt.

## How parliament acts

Meanwhile parliament had been at work on the measure since January 1976, a year before the public debate was started.

Ms. Walther told me about the law's progress in the legislature. She is a vivacious woman in her fifties who has been a deputy since the Chamber was established in 1950, with the exception of a nine-year period when her party had assigned her to other work. Being a deputy is a voluntary and part-time function and deputies are paid by the plant, farm, office or institution for which they work. In fact, Article 60, Section 3 of the Constitution provides "No professional or personal disadvantage may accrue to deputies through their legislative duties.



They are freed from their workplace when their tasks as deputy demand it. Their wages and salaries are to be continued during such times."

In parliament, because of her long experience, Ms. Walther is deputy chairperson of the Constitution and Law Commission and of her party's parliamentary caucus. She is also a member of the Council of State. Her party, the NDPD, was founded in May 1948, and recruits its membership from among professionals, independent tradespeople and craftsmen. At the time she joined she was a teacher, and she felt she could best make her contribution in its ranks.

"When a new law is proposed," Ms. Walther says, "it is first considered by the commissions most closely concerned. In this case it was ours and the commission on Labor and Social Affairs. After receiving the government report, we had a lengthy discussion on the preliminary draft. As you know, deputies had already played an important part in drawing that up. Then the commissions' tasks were defined. Ours was to make sure that the draft was consistent with the constitution, with international treaties we are partners to, and that it would not be repugnant or conflict with existing laws."

Another phase of the work was to hold discussions in communities and plants in the election districts. "They are important because they tell us what the voters think. We also had to work with ministries and planning commissions to make sure all provisions of the law can be implemented."

Many proposals, like that of the bakery workers, would require additional expenditures in time or money, and for that reason they sometimes have to be put off. In a socialist society, all wealth created is spent for the common interest since there is no private profit, but wealth has to be created before it can be consumed.

In addition to these discussions, each of the Chamber's 15 commissions<sup>2</sup> discusses a draft law before it gets to the

Chamber's floor. It is also discussed in each caucus, so that every deputy has an opportunity to participate since not all of them belong to a commission. The caucuses represent the five political parties, the Federation of Free German Trade Unions, the Free German Youth, the Democratic Women's Federation and the League of Culture.

Caucuses of the public organizations enable citizens not organized in a political party to participate in legislative activities. Altogether the four public organizations have 165 seats or 33 percent. Each caucus is represented on the Chamber's presidium as well as in the commissions to permit full exchange of views.

Unlike bourgeois parliaments, the size of a parliamentary delegation does not depend on the numerical strength of an organization. Ms. Walther takes pains to point out that the Socialist Unity Party has over two million members and holds 127 seats or 25.4 percent. The four other political parties, with memberships revolving around 100,000, have 52 seats each; the FDGB with 68 seats has the largest caucus after the SED; and the remaining 19.4 percent of the seats are distributed among the youth, women's and cultural organizations.

"People in the West often find it difficult to understand that our parliament is not composed of competitive organizations," Ms. Walther says. "We do vote, but the more important function of our parliament is to build consensus of all sections of the population. This is so because there are no conflicting social and economic interests. After all, we are all elected on the common platform of the National Front."

This does not mean that all decisions are unanimous, Ms. Walther says. She recalls the vote in 1971 on a law making abortions available on demand. "There were deputies who did not support the measure, for religious or ethical reasons. They voted no or abstained." In most cases, though, the vote is unanimous, she says, differences being resolved by discussion.



An index of the growth of democracy is the increasing breadth of public discussion. In 1961, when the previous labor code was passed, it was discussed by 1 million people, who made 23,000 proposals for change, compared with 5.3 million participants and 39,533 proposals in 1977.

There has also been an overall increase in public participation in proposed legislation. In 1965, a new family law was discussed by 750,000 voters. In 1973, 1.5 million people took part in the discussion of a law on the rights and duties of local government.<sup>3</sup> While one can assume broad interest in a law that regulates working conditions, the participation of 5.8 million union members is still an impressive display of democracy.

This shows that the bourgeois charge that socialist parliaments are "rubber stamps" is an attempt to obscure the broad, democratic participation in parliamentary affairs under socialism. More than that, it falsifies the true advantages that socialist legislative and parliamentary activities offer compared with those in capitalist societies.

This question is the subject of a comparative study of democracy in the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany. Its authors describe the basis of parliamentary procedures in their country, the GDR:

"Parliamentarianism grew up in the 18th and 19th centuries as the specific form of political rule of the bourgeoisie. Parliament provided the forum in which the various factions of the ruling class, organized in different political parties, carry on the struggle for their varying, non-antagonistic economic interests."<sup>4</sup> It goes on to point out various discriminatory rules which excluded workers from suffrage and "guaranteed the exclusive advantage of the institution to the bourgeoisie. After universal suffrage was won, the ruling class saw itself forced to secure its political rule through transformation within the parliamentary process, through removal of important decisions from the floor of parliament to other institutions under the more direct rule of capitalism's minions."

The study also describes the basis for socialist democracy. "With the far-reaching abolition of private ownership of the means of production in the GDR, the basis for a new approach to and a new content of democracy has been created, which is basically different from bourgeois democracy." It then points out that the criterion for bourgeois democracy is individual participation in political decision-making while that for socialist democracy is the degree in which working people are enabled and qualified to decide social measures that determine their living conditions.<sup>5</sup>

This socialist basis for democracy is anchored in the GDR's Constitution. In Article 49 it decrees:

"1) The People's Chamber determines by means of laws and decisions the aims and development of the German Democratic Republic in a final manner binding for all.

"2) The People's Chamber guarantees the main rules for the cooperation of citizens, organizations and state organs as well as their tasks in implementing the state plans for social development.

"3) The People's Chamber guarantees enforcement of its laws and decisions and lays down the principles to be adhered to by the Council of State, the Supreme Court and the Procurator General."

The fact is that parliamentary responsibilities in the GDR are the concern of the entire population. No areas of parliamentary jurisdiction are exempt from the people's decisions. The People's Chamber not only passes laws but also enacts economic plans that are decisive for the country's life. These plans are discussed by the People's Chamber commissions and acted upon by the Chamber as a whole, so that its activities coincide with the people's desires and needs. How different from the bourgeois democracies, where claims of freedom and democratic participation are not borne out in the reality of their legislative actions.



## 7 The Right to Work and Share in Management

During one of my first trips to the GDR, I interviewed an apprentice at EAW Treptow, one of Berlin's electrical appliance plants. He described in great detail his training and the various opportunities open to him. Toward the end of the interview, I asked him about his personal perspectives. Without hesitation he said, "I want to be a first-rate worker." What he actually said was *dufte*, a word in Berlin slang which defies translation. It corresponds to terrific, cool, and definitely conveys a sense of admiration.

I was rather stunned by that reply. Given the opportunities, I had expected him to want to become a technician, an engineer or a manager, options certainly within his reach. I expected him to want to get out of the working class, as most young people in our country would if they were given a chance. His reply characterized the changed position of workers in GDR society. No longer is their status insecure and at the bottom of the social structure, or their pay below that of other sections of the population. Employment is guaranteed, and real wages increase steadily. Since there is a labor shortage, most people can pick their jobs.

I asked him if it was a question of his pay. "Of course I'll make good money," he said, "but that is not the most important thing. I want to be part of the important role workers play." His argument illuminates the new and completely different role of the working class in socialist society. To him, workers' participation in management and in determining the course of the country was the most important aspect. The right to a job with a good



wage and a steadily improving standard of living was already taken for granted, but in order to comprehend the new role of the working class, we first have to examine the basis for these last two points.

Job security is completely taken for granted. I never met anyone who was not sure of having a job. It might not be exactly the job one wanted and, since there is a labor shortage and long lists of want ads are posted at nearly every factory gate, there is considerable job mobility. The charge is sometimes made that in socialist countries people cannot change jobs. This is an absurd lie. Many people I knew and interviewed had not only changed jobs but had even entered completely new fields. The Labor Code very specifically guarantees the right to terminate the work contract without which no one is employed. It is much harder for the employer to fire a worker than for the worker to leave the job. This is in line with the Constitutional provision (Article 24, Section 1) which guarantees the right to employment and "its free selection in accordance with social requirements and personal qualifications."

Such constitutional guarantees do not, of course, automatically provide jobs; what does is economic planning. Job training is predicated on the estimated Labor needs in all sections of the economy. As technological advances reduce the number of workers in some fields, planning provides for training in occupations where more people are needed. This makes possible the extension of social and cultural services.

Calculations based on the Statistical Abstract for 1979 show this shift. In 1949, the number of people in non-productive jobs was roughly 27 percent of the workforce. By 1978, it had increased to 45 percent. Non-productive employment includes all jobs that do not produce material goods, from public transport workers to university professors.

While the workforce increased about 11 percent in the period from 1949 to 1978, employment in agriculture and forestry declined nearly two-thirds, because of the introduction of modern technology. Employment in industry rose 50 percent. On the other hand, the number of employed in non-productive jobs rose at a far greater rate. The number of doctors rose from 13,000 to 32,000 in the 1949-1978 period, that of kindergarten teachers (for children from three to six years) rose from 19,000 to 53,000 from 1955 to 1977 and that of public school-teachers from 75,500 to 165,700.

Such shifts are made possible through socialist planning, which increases budgets for social expenditures as funds become available as a result of increased production. For example, the budget for education increased 8.5 times between 1950 and 1978 and that for cultural expenditures - including radio and television - seven times.

Another important pro-working class aspect of socialist planning is the distribution of leisure time. The system of reduction in work hours without loss of pay in the GDR is instructive. In 1949 the workweek was 48 hours. In 1957 the workweek for most categories of workers was reduced to 45 hours affecting 55 percent of the non-agricultural workforce. By 1967, the five-day week had been introduced with a 43 3/4-hour week for all with the exception of shift workers who had a 42-hour week. At the same time, paid vacations were increased to a minimum of 15 working days, with 65 percent of the workforce having 18 working days.

In 1972 the workweek was cut to 40 hours for mothers with three or more children, and mothers with two children on shift work. Paid vacations were increased again in 1975 and 1979, to a minimum of 18 and 21 days respectively. Starting in 1976, a process of gradual reduction of the workweek to 40 hours was started. The first beneficiaries were, again, shift workers and moth-



ers.<sup>1</sup> In addition, paid maternity leave was increased from 18 to 26 weeks in 1976 and the "baby year" was introduced. (See Chapter 11.)

It is interesting evidence of the workers' relation to the state that, when the transition to the 40-hour week was discussed, as part of the Labor Code of July 1977, some workers voiced opposition. Dr. Walter Hantsche told me that quite a few workers in basic industry were of the opinion that "rather than cut the workweek, they should continue to increase the output and strengthen the economy." This view did not prevail, but it is not very likely that a worker in our country would take such a position. That many GDR workers did so reflects their consciousness of their ownership of the means of production in a socialist state.

### Plant closings under socialism

The overall protection of workers' jobs covers the contingency of plant phase-outs. This process was illustrated in 1978 when the country's only anthracite mine was closed down because it had been exhausted. About 15,000 workers were affected, and not one was left unemployed. The mine's output had declined steadily over the past 20 years, and the phasing-out process was begun in 1974. The GDR Labor Code rules that management must assure an alternate job at least three months before a change of this type is made (Article 49, Section 2). Workers cannot be fired unless another, comparable job is offered elsewhere. Because of the labor shortage, many jobs were available, but many of them required different skills and most were at other locations.

To diminish the problems of moving miners and their families, a plant for prefabricated housing construction parts was built near the mine, and would employ 850 workers. The mine's social institutions – canteen, library,

policlinic and training center – were taken over by the new plant, so that they could service the plant and community, and the employees could stay on the job. Several nearby enterprises, including a lignite extraction equipment plant, were also anxious to employ more workers. Mine electricians, tool and die makers, and some other specialized trades could adapt to their new jobs without difficulty, but miners had to be retrained. They attended courses for varying periods and, for the duration of this training, received the average wage earned underground. In addition, all workers were entitled to a substantial "transition payment." A guiding principle of the operation was that no move can be made detrimental to the workers' living standards. As the Minister for Coal and Energy told workers at the very first meeting about the mine closing: "Nothing will be decided against your interests."

### Wages and work

Workers' pay, in socialist society, is not uniform. They are paid according to the Marxist tenet "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his work,"<sup>2</sup> which is incorporated in the GDR Constitution, Article 2, Section 3.

Generally speaking, the wage structure has a basic minimum wage for each type of work and level of skill. On top of that, there is an incentive wage according to performance. Youth brigade members at the Pump and Valve Works in the Halle district explained how this works. There is a flexible wage fund, allocated from the plant's earnings, which is used to supplement the basic wage.

In the brigade, which had 16 members, the basic average wage was 3.70 marks an hour. To this would be added, from the wage fund, up to a maximum of 1.40



marks an hour. Determination of the exact amount paid to each worker each month was made by a committee composed of representatives of the brigade, the trade union and management. "Anyone who worked well receives the full additional 1.40," Brigade Leader Gert Wunderlich explained. "But anyone absent without cause or goofing off in some other way might only get 70 or 50 pfennigs. Generally, the committee's decision is accepted, because everyone in the brigade knows who worked well and who didn't. Of course if someone goofs off, the others have to work harder and do part of his or her work in order to fulfill the plan. Sometimes a decision of the committee is challenged, and then we call a brigade meeting to discuss it. Occasionally a decision is changed, but most often the committee's reasoning prevails."

With this bonus and other payments, skilled workers do very well – so well, in fact, that they sometimes earn more than salaried personnel with higher qualifications.

I once overheard a discussion between two young chemical workers with whom I happened to share a table at a restaurant in Schwedt, a petrochemical industry town based on Soviet oil. They were bragging about their earnings and their savings accounts. "My cousin, who is a year older than I, hasn't got a cent to his name," one of them said. "He is at the university and scrounges along on the stipend. When he's finished, he'll get a job and still make less than I do. I wouldn't be found dead in that situation." While the sentiments may not be admirable, they were based on fact, and the government is conscious of these inequities and is trying to find ways of ironing them out. At the crane-building plant in Eberswalde, which employs 3,300 workers, Director Klaus Jaehner told a reporter that he earns about twice what a skilled worker makes.<sup>3</sup>

Neither job security nor the amount of wages motivated the young apprentice in his determination to become

a "first-rate" worker. His dreams, he said, were of deeds like those of Adolf Hennecke. Hennecke, a miner, pioneered in increasing production by better work organization and a more rational use of technology. In October, 1948, he fulfilled the average work quota for mining by 387 percent. After this feat he issued an appeal to all workers, employees and technicians in the people's owned enterprises, calling on all workers to learn that the plants "are their own and the people's property which they administer, and that the results of their work benefit all the people." His achievement spearheaded a movement throughout the Soviet Zone to produce more in order to raise the living standard. Lenin described this type of development in 1919 when he wrote: "Communism begins when the rank-and-file workers display an enthusiastic concern, that is undaunted by arduous toil to increase the productivity of labor, husband every pood of grain, coal, iron and other products, which do not accrue to the workers personally or to their 'close' kith and kin, but to their 'distant' kith and kin, i. e. to society as a whole."<sup>4</sup>

Such efforts, Lenin said, are "the beginning of a revolution that is more difficult, more tangible, more radical and more decisive than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for it is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory over the habits left as a heritage to the worker and peasant by accursed capitalism. Only when this victory is consolidated will the new social discipline, socialist discipline, be created; then and only then will a reversion to capitalism be impossible, will communism become really invincible."<sup>5</sup>

The realization that the living standards of all individuals and of the community as a whole are determined by the quality and quantity of production has gradually spread in people's consciousness. Since Hennecke set the example, the effort has taken many forms, the center piece of which is the workers' participation in determin-



ing production policy. One of its aspects is the plan discussion.

Members of the youth brigade at the Pump and Valve Works explained their role in such discussions.

The overall economic plan is broken down, and suggestions for production quotas are submitted to each enterprise. There it is discussed in each department. "Even though the discussion took place during the summer months, the peak vacation time," Wunderlich told me, "76 percent of the workers participated in the discussion and every third one made a concrete proposal. The plan called for an increase of 12 percent in production for the plant. Since our work consists of the final testing of the product, we had to find a way of increasing our work without an increase in the workforce. We developed the idea of building a mobile testing device to add to the two stationary ones. We had the necessary parts – these are complicated electronic devices – and we managed to mount the new one without outside help. We have two engineers in our crew, and the rest of us also have highly developed skills, some in more than one specialty. The new device saved us 80 hours a month." Many of the pumps are exported, and the brigade took exceptional pride in the fact that their products were used in the Orenburg gas pipeline which brings natural gas from the Ural Mountains to the GDR and other CMEA countries.

The brigade also took part in the inventors' movement, in which workers make proposals for technological improvements. An important aspect of this effort is that the proposals are frequently realized with the help of technological and scientific personnel which helps break down barriers between workers and intelligentsia. (See Chapter 9.)

A very interesting example of this effort was related by Klaus Friz, a former agricultural specialist turned miner. He worked at the Thomas Muentzer copper mine,

which is part of the Mansfeld enterprises. "Of course we can't increase production through speedup," he said. "We must do it by improving the technology and by utilizing the time properly." His brigade, consisting of six men, had just successfully tested a new method of excavation. Instead of filling the shaft after extraction, which had been the accepted method for centuries, they filled it by permitting it to collapse. "We tested it for three months during the night shift," he said. "At first we went through lengthy discussions and calculations with the engineers and technicians. It works out well. It makes our work easier and faster. Of course we had to overcome a lot of resistance. For centuries, miners considered a collapsing shaft a disaster – and here we wanted to do it on purpose." The method developed by Friz's group is part of "scientific work organization," one of the main pillars of economic growth. What was produced in eight hours in 1975 must be accomplished in six in 1980.

One thing required for such accomplishments is ever-increasing job qualification. Therefore Friz had decided to take a correspondence course to qualify as a mine engineer.

These new relationships of workers to their jobs are summed up in a GDR textbook. "In the People's Owned Enterprises the working people create the greatest part of the wealth of socialist society. Here the working class realizes its function as owner of the means of production, creates new, socialist relations between people and participates most directly in the determination and planning of social production."<sup>6</sup>

I frequently asked people – workers, managers, trade-union officials, personal acquaintances – if they thought everyone understood the need to make the utmost effort to increase productivity for the benefit of society as a whole.

Nobody gave an unequivocally affirmative answer. All emphasized that great strides had been made in this proc-



ess, but that the struggle to change people's attitudes always lags behind the changes in economy. Marxists call this the different rate of development between the base and the superstructure.

"To steadily improve this consciousness is precisely the nature of the struggle of class-conscious workers and revolutionaries in our conditions," Communists in many walks of life told me. "We must instill an ever-increasing sense of the responsibility of each individual for the whole of society, because unlike under capitalism, they determine the progress of society."

These are the reasons why anyone would choose to be a "first-rate worker."

## 8 Union Power

"The difference between our unions and those in capitalist countries is that here democracy does not stop at the factory gate," Dr. Johanna Toepfer told me. She is deputy chairperson of the 8.6-million-member Federation of Free German Trade Unions (FDGB). "In our plants nothing happens that has not been discussed by and approved by the unions. In all capitalist countries, the boss remains in control, no matter what so-called co-determination or profit-sharing schemes there might be."

I had asked to interview Dr. Toepfer to get answers to the many questions I have been asked about unions in socialist countries: Why don't workers strike? Why are unions necessary, if their only task is the administration of welfare schemes? Do they really have a say in anything?

The question of the right to strike is frequently used to belittle socialism, as if the right to strike in some – by no means all – capitalist countries were a guarantee of the workers' well-being. Dr. Toepfer is eminently qualified to answer this question, not only because she is second in command of the FDGB but because, now in her early fifties, she remembers the bad old days.

In 1933, Hitler outlawed all unions and substituted a state-controlled German Workers' Front. At the time of the victory over fascism, Johanna Toepfer had just finished the eight-year elementary school and had no option other than to take an unskilled job. For a workers' daughter, job-training was considered a waste, because she was expected to marry and quit. She went to work cleaning railroad cars.



"One must remember that unions had to be completely reorganized and workers taught how to use them," she told me. "At the outset, the most important task was to assure that no war would ever again be started from German soil."

The expropriation of enterprises that had belonged to war criminals and war profiteers was an important step in this direction. "The takeover created an entirely new situation for the workers. They had become the owners," Dr. Toepfer said. "Teaching them their new rights and responsibilities was a protracted process. And, of course, for many years people's owned industries existed side by side with capitalist ones. Therefore our first Constitution, in 1949, specifically granted the right to strike."

By the time the second Constitution was adopted, in 1968, the people's owned sector comprised about 97 percent of the economy and, Dr. Toepfer said, "the workers had learned to use their rights. They had gotten used to having a decisive voice in the development of their plants. The right to strike was no longer a class necessity."

Even so, the Constitution contains no prohibition against strikes. It has a section outlining broad union rights, and it states that unions are intended "to safeguard the interests of the workers, office workers and intelligentsia through comprehensive co-determination in the state, the economy and the social sphere."

As an example of the far-reaching union rights, Dr. Toepfer cited the law that all rationalization measures have to be approved by the union before they can be introduced. "It is practically unknown in capitalist countries that we have such a law," she said. "It places the responsibility on the unions to make sure that no disadvantage accrues to workers through rationalization and the introduction of new technology."

She explained that strikes, since they interrupt production, are really contrary to the workers' own interests.

In addition, the Labor Code provides many ways in which unions can apply pressure when their rights are in jeopardy. "This includes the right to demand the dismissal of managerial employees, including the director," she told me. "That sometimes happens, but there are many preliminary steps to enforce the workers' demands." Each place of employment has a "conflict commission" composed of trade-union members who are elected to two-year terms. These commissions deal with violations of social and union norms and laws. Also the Labor Code has many provisions spelling out the workers' rights vis-à-vis management and how these rights must be safeguarded by the union.

Despite all this, an occasional work stoppage occurs. She described a situation that might develop into such an action if not remedied in time. "I recently visited a new, highly mechanized plant for prefabricated housing construction elements," she said. "It is a fine plant and the hard work is done by machines, except in the department where the units are wallpapered. That wallpaper is still cut by hand, which is very hard work. Rationalization simply was not consistently applied. The plant's union committee demanded that management resolve this matter, and unless prompt action is taken the workers might resort to a stoppage. We try to avoid that, because it harms the economy and is basically against everyone's interest."

Though strikes rarely occur, Dr. Toepfer said, those that do are usually the result "of bureaucratic and heartless attitudes on the part of management or of violations of the Labor Code. They occur when management doesn't listen to the workers' complaints."

She said that workers would not be punished or persecuted for such actions. "You see, our society is not free of conflict," she explained. "We never claim that. But we try to see that conflicts are resolved in the best interests of all, which is possible under socialism."



That such solutions are largely impossible under capitalism and that, as U. Jaeggli, an FRG bourgeois pundit writes, "bourgeois rights stop at the factory gate,"<sup>1</sup> is easily documented.

Dr. Karl-Heinz Badstube, in a pamphlet on socialist democracy, presents evidence of this for the several capitalist countries. In relation to the FRG, he writes: "Trade unions are generally expected to give up wage struggles. A decision of the FRG Federal Labor Court on April 21, 1971, demanded that union struggles 'must be subordinated to the supreme law of relationships. In this connection the economic realities must be observed and public interest must obviously not be violated.'" For "public interest" here, read employers' interest, as distinct from the interests of the working class.

Elsewhere Badstube relates that on February 28, 1972, the same court ruled that workers "must not act contrary to the interests of the employer or impinge upon them." He reports that in 1974 and 1975 employers sued in the Federal Supreme Court against a law containing a watered-down version of the union demand for co-determination of industries. While the suit was rejected, the court ruling pointed out that the law does not promise parity and that the owners remain in control. The author continues, pointing out that in the latter part of the seventies, 85,000 steel workers and tens of thousands of printing trades and chemical workers were locked out when they "utilized their right to strike to defend their jobs."<sup>2</sup>

Though FRG pundits readily use the absence of a law guaranteeing the right to strike to downgrade the GDR, no such law exists in the FRG. Its Constitution merely provides - Article 9, Section 3 - "the right to organize for the protection and improvement of economic conditions." The foregoing demonstrates how tenuous the right is in practice.

In the GDR, Dr. Toepfer pointed out, union rights

are firmly rooted in the shop. Not only do workers have a voice in economic planning, but they are becoming increasingly aware that their own and the country's welfare is in their own hands. Through their union, they determine the implementation of the economic plans (see previous chapter) and control the hundreds of items of everyday living, which range from industrial safety to the quality of the food in the cafeteria and the recreational facilities of union members and their families. Said Dr. Toepfer, "There is no area of life in which trade-union activity and initiative are not markedly increasing all the time."

### Union members shape their lives

The breadth of union involvement is reflected in the fact that nearly every fourth union member holds some elected office. Even accounting for the fact that some are involved in more than one function, this rank-and-file participation is something to be proud of. I seldom spoke to a worker who was not in some way involved. I had to probe for this involvement, because it was taken much for granted. Sometimes a worker would tell me that he or she was not active in the union nor a member of any political party. Questioned further, it would often turn out that they did participate in a parents' council, were on the board of a consumer co-op or were active in National Front activities.

The two million elected volunteer union officials are shop stewards, members of conflict commissions, in charge of cultural and sports activities, members of women's commissions in shops, social insurance administrators, members of production councils, or health and safety delegates.

Dr. Toepfer made an interesting point about the latter. "Very few people abroad know that we train our



own safety inspectors. I am sometimes asked why we don't leave that to the health authorities. But this way we have direct control over health conditions in the plants. As a result, industrial accidents have decreased appreciably."

Statistics show that injuries at the workplace declined from 48.6 per 1,000 workers in 1960 to 34.4 in 1974 and the downward trend continued. The full-time union health inspectors are supported in their efforts by 200,000 elected volunteers who are given classes and instruction in the law and its application.

The two million trade union functionaries do not include about 30,000 unionists elected to legislative posts, ranging from the 68-member FDGB caucus in the People's Chamber to the municipal and local councils. To this must be added the fact that, increasingly, nominations for political office are initiated at the candidate's place of work, enabling the union to make its views felt even if the candidate represents a political party or other mass organization.

Outside the shops and offices, the union's role is most visible in smaller communities. It was particularly evident in some of the small towns in the Halle district, where the giants of the chemical industry are located. Time and again I was shown community facilities built by the union but available for community purposes; sports fields, clubhouses, children's institutions. I saw bowling alleys, swimming pools, saunas and many other facilities built by community efforts to which the union had contributed materials or the use of machinery or funds.

### Are unions necessary under socialism?

The union participates in all phases of life in the shop and the community. "The unity of purpose of the state

and unions in the GDR in all questions of social development has grown organically and is rooted in the common base," FDGB chairperson Harry Tisch wrote. "The GDR is the state of working-class power and the trade union is its most comprehensive class organization."<sup>3</sup>

This already answers the question as to whether trade unions are necessary under socialism but Dr. Toepfer, who is a member of the SED's Central Committee, made a few additional points. "When people ask this question, the thought behind it is often that the union is not different from the party. That is far from the truth. About 80 percent of our union membership belong to no political party — more than six million of our members are not Communists.

"We have a similar situation among union officials. Only about 20 percent of the 275,000 elected union representatives are SED members. It is through the union that the broad dialogue with the working class is made possible. This dialogue involves those who agree with us and those who don't. The rights of the unions are so broadly defined that no member can say that anyone is denied an opportunity to voice opinions."

While union membership is not compulsory and there are no closed shops, 99 percent of the workforce belong to one of the 16 industrial unions that make up the FDGB.

Dr. Toepfer referred back to her visit at the prefabricated housing construction plant where the workers had a beef about cutting wallpaper by hand. "There are about 20 workers in that department and only three of them belong to the SED," she said. "The shop steward is a non-party unionist. Of course the union backs him up, and the union as well as the SED get behind management to get things changed."

Ehrenfried Luck is the party secretary at VEB Kranbau Eberswalde, largest producer of dockside cranes in Europe, employing 3,300 people. During an interview,



he was asked about the difference between the functions of the party organization and the union.

"Generally speaking, it is our task to see that everything meshes. There are various interests and organizations in the plant. There is management, who are evaluated by their economic results. There are varying experience and also differences in the educational level of the workforce. All this has to be coordinated to enable us to make progress. As the leading political force in our society, the SED determines the direction of development on a scientific basis. It is our task to see that no conflicts develop. We represent the overall interests of the working class. The union represents the immediate interests of its members – workers, employees, engineers, women, youths – which are not necessarily identical, and organizes their participation in the leadership of the plant through the various forms which have developed."<sup>4</sup>

A frequent ploy in the effort to downplay the role of unions in socialist countries is to claim that they are "only" responsible for social welfare matters. Even though this is only their secondary function, Dr. Toepfer pointed out that it is by no means insignificant. "Having this control had been an old demand of the German trade union movement and I must say that our social and recreational programs are quite outstanding."

This is certainly true in comparison with even the most extensive social services offered in any developed capitalist country, and it is useful to keep in mind that ours is the most backward of them on that score.

The FDGB is in charge of social insurance funds that have increased about 600 percent in the 30-year existence of the GDR, though the workers' contribution to the fund has not changed. As a result, the insured pay only about one fourth of the cost of services received. The rest of the tab is picked up by the state.

Increased benefits in the first 30 years of the GDR's

existence include a rise in aid to working mothers, from 23 to 894.5 million marks, pension disbursements increased from 1.8 to 11.2 billion marks and union subsidized stays at health resorts increased from 27,700 to 326,000 a year.

On the other hand, expectations rise. When the monthly "household day" was extended in 1976 to include married women without children and single women over 40, there was heated discussion as to whether this should also be extended to men. At present, the law provides this privilege only for single fathers of children under 18, and husbands of invalid wives. "We cannot afford this at present," Dr. Toepfer said, "and we want it to be very specifically a measure to ease the position of women."

When I asked some proponents of household days for men why the benefit might not be split, affording all workers such a day every other month, this suggestion was rejected unanimously, with the reply that no move should ever be made to curtail the benefits of living conditions of any group. It was a fine lesson for me on one of the principles of socialism.



## 9 Education to Rule

"Every apprentice, whether training to be a beautician, mechanic or butcher, receives a course in data processing and basic electronics. Today it is a matter of general education to understand at least the rudiments of these matters." The speaker was Dr. Bodo Weidemann, state secretary for vocational education. His remark brought home to me the completely different premises of education under socialism and capitalism.

Karl Marx, in *The German Ideology*, characterized the class nature of education thus:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i. e., the class which is the ruling *material* force in society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production. . ."<sup>1</sup>

In practical application, two main aspects should be considered: who is being educated and what are they being taught?

When I went to school in pre-World War II Germany, education was plainly class-oriented. Workers' children, in the main, attended eight years of public school, tuition free, which prepared them to become workers. Then there was a ten-year "middle school," for which a small tuition was imposed – to prepare future white-collar workers. Finally, for the children of those who could afford a stiffer tuition, there were the schools for the college-bound, which terminated in a college admission diploma. A few places in the two latter types of schools were reserved for gifted children of working-



class parents, who were admitted tuition-free. These students were, of course, subjected to the daily indignities of being poor among those economically comfortable, and I remember well the mortification of one of my classmates whenever the teacher appealed to students to ask their parents to pay something above the required amount for class outings, to permit "less fortunates" to come along.

Added to this class stratification of the educational system – and we are talking here about publicly supported schools not private ones – was the class nature of the curriculum. This differed in the Weimar republic from the Hitler years. While bourgeois democratic traditions were taught during the Weimar republic, the Nazis vigorously suppressed such "weaknesses" and designed the entire education toward the spread of fascist doctrines. But in either case, the current needs of capitalism were vigorously pursued by the educational establishment of the "neutral" state.

War and national disaster did little to change the FRG educational system, which is controlled by the state governments. A generation after the war's end, differentiated schools still prevail, though they are generally tuition-free. In some states, the length of general education has edged up to nine years, and preparations are being made to increase that to ten, which is the standard school education in the GDR. This is another example of how the advances of socialism influence the capitalist German state.

At present FRG children are still "tracked" according to achievement, and "culturally deprived" children from working-class families are unable to meet the standards. A survey conducted some years ago showed that "22 percent of the students in the general schools do not attain their goal or must leave before they graduate. Thirty-five percent of all working-class children drop out of [eight year] public school and are forced to earn their living as unskilled labor. . ."<sup>2</sup>

An important step in safeguarding FRG ruling-class interests in public education was the "anti-radical decree" agreed on by the state governments early in 1972. It provided that no one with "radical" views should hold a public-service job. The law was applied to progressives, Communists and non-Communists, with the brunt of the attack directed against the teaching profession. Critics of the ruling class were dismissed or, as the result of snooping and investigations, intimidated. Of course, progressive forces have vigorously fought against these witch hunts and have scored some successes, but by the beginning of 1980 they had not yet been able to defeat the practice.

In the GDR, confrontation with the fascist past is thoroughly integrated in the curriculum and at all levels of its educational system. Many schools are named for anti-fascist resistance fighters or for prominent progressives from many nations, among them Paul Robeson and Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. From their first grade on, students learn about these people's contribution to humanity's struggle for progress.

### People's view of history

Throughout their school years and according to their levels of perception, students are taught the progressive and humanitarian aspects of their history. The in-depth study of fascism and its consequences comes in ninth-grade history classes, when 35 lessons are used to teach about the 1933 to 1945 period. The textbook allots 146 pages for the subject, with 91 photographs and 80 references.

Neither is any secret made of the class aspect of education. Minister of Education Margot Honecker, in a speech to the Eighth Educational Congress of the GDR in 1978, put it like this:

"Every school is subordinated to the dominant ideology.



We have never denied this, and there are good reasons why we can make this statement. Our schools impart the ideology of the working class, an ideology serving the vital interests of the people, pointing the way to social emancipation and paving the way for a society in which people are free from oppression and exploitation. . . ."

The process of changing the class content of the educational system started right after the victory over fascism, though the emphasis then was to uproot all fascist ideology and bring to the fore the democratic and humanitarian traditions of the people. But even then the goal of giving the working class a decisive role in education was pursued. Within two years, 43,000 new teachers were trained in brief crash courses and integrated in the school system. Special university prep courses were organized with the aim of qualifying young working-class people for higher education. In 1945 and 1946, only 19 percent of the students in institutions of higher learning came from working-class or peasant origins, but by 1949 their number had increased to 36.2 percent. By that time the socialized sector of the material production had a slight edge in the economy - 56.8 percent socially owned and 43.2 percent still in private hands. As this shows, the change in the educational system - which Communists call part of the superstructure - lagged slightly behind the change in the ownership of production.

To complete the process of change in education, university preparatory courses were consolidated in 1949 into the Workers' and Peasants' Faculties, which prepared the formerly educationally deprived students for institutions of higher learning. By 1964, compensatory education had achieved its goal. The new student generation had been educated in a general, unified school system with equal educational opportunities.

Such equal education, Minister Honecker said in the speech quoted above, "is an achievement without precedent in the history of our people, that all children, irre-

spective of social status of their parents, of their world outlook and religion, benefit from education of an equally high standard. . . ."

In 1965, a further step was taken to improve the general educational level. A law was passed creating the ten-year general, polytechnical school. Polytechnical education has the purpose of instilling in students an appreciation of work and the role of the working class. Once a week, starting with the seventh grade, students spend half a day in a plant, on a farm or some other workplace, to become acquainted with working life. This is not part of the future job training but an effort to acquaint students with the role of work and workers in the society and to instill respect for both.

Actually for most pupils, this process starts in the first grade, and not merely because this attitude is deeply anchored in the curriculum. A great effort is made to see that each class has a "sponsor brigade" in a plant or institution. The sponsors - who undertake the task as one of the brigade's social duties - meet with the children several times a year. They show them their workplace and explain its nature; together they celebrate graduation, Christmas and other holidays. They take their classes on excursions and take a hand when special difficulties develop.

This effort does not work equally well in every case, but quite a number of children proudly volunteered stories about their adventures with "their" brigade. Many workers, men and women alike, also told me of their activities with "their" class as a normal part of their social activities. "Today it is considered a normal feature of life," Minister Honecker said, "that schoolchildren work and learn in factories, and that tens of thousands of workers and cooperative farmers are directly involved in the children's training. . . ."

But to return to the apprentice training which aroused my interest about the process of educating future workers



to participate in decision-making and thus in ruling the country.

Secretary of State Weidemann explained that, in addition to data processing and basic electronics, every apprentice also has to take courses in socialist law, political science, industrial economics, mechanization and automation and sports.

Socialist law covers chiefly labor law but it also includes the basis of the civil code and family law. It has become an important principle in the GDR to write laws so that they can be readily understood by all citizens. Political science covers material in dialectical and historical materialism. The same material is covered in the 11th and 12th grade of the college-bound Extended Secondary School, roughly an equivalent of our junior college. Therefore, in terms of political education, all young people who finish their training have the same starting point. Industrial economics deals with problems of planning and management in the particular industry for which the apprentices train. *Education to rule.*

A second section of the theoretical apprenticeship training deals with the technology involved in whatever skill is to be learned, and the third component of the course is practical training. The relation of practice to theory varies in different trades, from one to one as in the case of data processors, to one to three for ladies' garment workers. Instruction in data processing, mechanization and automation, and electronics varies from 190 to 114 hours depending on the trade, but, as Dr. Weidemann said, everyone learns enough "to be able to understand in general terms the basics of modern industrial society."

## Opportunities for everyone

There are two basic variations from the vocational training described above. One is the three-year vocational course with university entrance exam. The other is a three-year training course for the dwindling number of students who leave school, usually at age 14, after the eighth grade. They leave because they have learning or disciplinary difficulties. We would call them drop-outs, but in the GDR they are not treated as such. Those willing to enter vocational training receive a three-year apprenticeship, during which they are taught – in addition to their trade – the principal subjects they would have learned in the ninth and tenth grades. This is just one of the many varied provisions offered to educate people to the full extent of their abilities and it takes into account the fact that readiness to learn develops at different times and in different ways in each individual.

I had assumed that those wanting to attend university or other institutions of higher learning would make every effort to get into the 12-year Extended Secondary School. Admission to these schools is on a competitive basis. The alternative is the three-year apprenticeship with university entrance exam. My conditioning in capitalist educational methods had led me to think that all students would prefer to take the 12-year direct route to higher education. I was wrong. The combination course is gaining in popularity.

At the vocational school for housing construction in Marzahn, Berlin's largest housing construction site, Roger Baierlein, 18, told me that he had chosen this course even though he was offered an opportunity to attend Extended Secondary School. "I had decided already in eighth grade that it would be better to spend three years and get a basic understanding of the skills involved. I have always wanted to be a construction engineer and when I finish my training I will attend construction



academy. I think my practical experience will be an asset."

In addition to his profession, he will have gained a thorough understanding of the worker's viewpoint during his training.

Incidentally, apprentices are considered workers and have a work contract. They are protected by the Labor Code and assured a job when they graduate. The Labor Code has many provisions relating to apprentices. They are guaranteed an annual minimum paid vacation of 24 days, have special health protection and are paid on a sliding scale that increases with the progress of their training.

The importance of having experience with the working class was also brought home by another encounter. I met a young woman who was studying criminal law. She explained that one of the conditions for admission to the law school is one year's work experience in a plant. "It was not a modern plant and the work was very hard," she said. "At first I didn't think I would be able to make it. Of course, I became a member of a labor team and most colleagues were helpful. It was not skilled work, because I had no skill. But I did learn many things, like how tired you get doing boring and mechanical work all day and why such workers may not be interested in going to the theater at night, and how hard you have to fight to interest the brigade in cultural activities, and above all, how workers think." She said that she is glad to have had that experience and that it would be essential to her in judging people properly.

At the time of the founding of the GDR in 1949, only about 25 percent of the workforce had a skilled trade. By 1977, this had increased to cover 60 percent of the workforce, and the projection was made that, by 1985, 70 percent of the workforce will have qualifications of a skilled worker or even more advanced training. In the 1977-78 school year only 2.5 percent of the gradu-

ates from the ten-year school did not take further training.

A question frequently asked about socialism is whether or not people can freely choose their profession. I once took a hitchhiker along - a diversion almost inconceivable in the United States today - a young man in his mid-twenties. He told me that he was working in a machine shop, having acquired the skills of a mechanic. "I make good money," he said, "but I am quitting this fall." He told me that he had wanted to become an actor when he was in school, but had not passed the competitive exam. He then became an apprentice mechanic. "Meanwhile I joined the amateur theater group at our plant. I was quite active and liked it very much, and I became convinced that I wanted to get into professional theater. After four years I again took the exam for the theater institute and this time I passed. I won't get paid by the plant, because they have no interest in my going there. But I will get a state stipend and, since I am not married, I'll make out." He added that he was glad to have another profession. "It's something to fall back on if I should feel like it," he said.

Only a certain number of people are trained for each available job, the number of jobs being determined through economic planning. I was told there are always far more applicants than are needed for journalism schools and medical colleges. One young woman had become a medical therapist when she failed to make it into medical school. But within the needs of society, the individual's wishes are carefully taken into account.

The capitalist approach, "free choice" of profession, is quite different. The situation in the FRG was characterized by Egon Lutz, the labor market expert of the Social Democratic caucus in the Bundestag. He said that 30 percent of the young people being trained for specific jobs would find no employment opportunities. And the Federal Labor Department of the FRG estimates that



9.7 million students will graduate from school between 1977 and 1987, and for 2.4 million of them no jobs, and no vocational or professional training will be available.<sup>3</sup>

In the GDR, however, Dr. Weidemann told me that 80 percent of all apprentices are able to get into training of their first choice. This does not happen by accident. Vocational guidance is part of the educational process in the GDR. It starts early through contact with workers in different trades. In the seventh grade, students start attending lectures given by job counselors, visit plants and institutions on "open door" days and have access to guidance centers.

Since there is a labor shortage, most GDR enterprises actively solicit apprentices. The Leuna Chemical Works, which employs 30,000, has a 34-page brochure which they send to prospective trainees. This folder not only describes the various jobs in the industry but also the attractive opportunities for promotion to management positions. The pamphlet also details all the fringe benefits, the types of sport and recreational facilities, and describes the dormitories, where they pay a fee for room and board of 1.10 marks a day (starting pay for apprentices is 100 marks a month).

One cannot claim that every worker likes or is satisfied with his or her job. The important difference between capitalism and socialism is that socialism offers far greater chances for advancement, far greater mobility for the individual to satisfy creative instincts.

## Advancement and creativity

This starts with the emphasis put on vocational training. While capitalism resorts to unskilled labor wherever possible, socialism offers skill training to all school graduates. Critics sometimes say that some of those who receive

vocational training are forced to work on jobs which unskilled workers could do with brief on-the-job training. That is capitalism's "efficient" way of doing it.

I discussed this with educators, trade unionists and party secretaries in various plants. Their estimate of the number of people whose skills are not fully utilized varied, but all rejected the notion of "overtraining" and were unanimous about its benefits.

"A trained and skilled worker has a much better grasp of the production process and is therefore able to play quite a different role in the collective," a shop steward told me. "It means that they not only understand their own jobs but most of the jobs in their department; they can stand in for one another. More importantly, they understand the process and are able to make proposals to improve production and working conditions.

"Finally, they are prepared when new machinery is introduced. It not only takes less time to train them but they are able to make valuable proposals. For example, we are getting new technology for our department. It will change the entire work process. As it is, it will create some difficulties in shifting workers to new jobs. But it is infinitely easier for the skilled workers than the unskilled ones. That is the reason we keep urging people to improve their qualifications even when they are already working."

The pressure for working people to improve their qualifications is considerable and takes many forms. There is often a material incentive, because a higher skill often commands more pay. But that is not always the reason. A mother of two children, in her mid-thirties, who worked for a pharmaceutical firm, told me that she was taking a two-year course "because there are so many changes in our field and I want to stay on top. I don't expect to get a better job. Believe me, it's hard to study while you work and have a family, but I felt I owed it to myself."

The law provides that those who improve their skills



while working receive time off with pay for study and exams. That applies for those preparing for skilled workers' exams as well as to those in a university course. In addition, enterprises can delegate a worker for full-time study in the field, in which case the worker will receive his or her average wage for the duration of their training.

Training employed workers is not confined to improvement of job-related skills. There are training courses for elected officials, for judicial jobs, and for trade-union jobs of various types, including safety inspectors.

In most plants there are "schools of socialist labor," which discuss world and local political events. When the new Labor Code was passed, thousands of union officials in the plants were given courses in the new law. *Education to rule.*

It is a basic principle of socialism that the gap between manual and intellectual labor must be eliminated. The inventor's movement, the plan discussions – needed to increase production – also contribute to closing this gap. A sociological study conducted in 1975 put it like this: "The increase of the mental part of all labor is a law of socialism and as such an important basis of the creative content of work." The authors say that under socialism there are still monotonous and physical hard labor, "which must be overcome step by step. This can only be accomplished through a constant enrichment of the content of the work with creative elements." The study then quotes a survey conducted among production workers about their feelings toward two aspects of their work.<sup>4</sup>

Asked about their satisfaction with the technical equipment of their workplace, 33.9 percent said they were satisfied, 45.5 percent were partially satisfied and 20.7 percent were dissatisfied. The same workers were asked how they felt about their opportunity to use their mental capacities. In answer, 59.6 percent expressed satisfaction,

30.0 percent partial satisfaction and only 10.4 percent dissatisfaction.

There is an ongoing movement of inventions among young workers, students, technicians and engineers. They develop innovations in their particular fields which are evaluated in competitions on plant, district and finally national level. At regular large "innovator's fairs," the best of these inventions are shown and prizes are awarded. More importantly, the inventions are offered to other enterprises for use free of charge.

This work is voluntary, though if the invention is successful the innovators receive a royalty. Over the years, the movement has gained magnitude and now more than a third of the young people are involved. I spoke to some of these inventors at one of their fairs, probing for their motivation. After all, it did mean extra hours of work, since most of their development and experimentation is done outside working hours. Reasons for participation varied. Some did it because the Free German Youth encouraged the movement. Others because their team had undertaken the responsibility. Still others had their careers in mind. Having worked on a successful invention would certainly enhance their chances for advancement. Some said that it would be a help to the economy and therefore would indirectly benefit them. But the majority mentioned among their motives the creative aspect as a source of personal satisfaction. "It's interesting to work on an invention," one young woman said. "We do our job every day and it is sometimes boring. This way you can test your ideas and be creative. It makes work more fun."

All these are aspects of the multiphasic effort to develop the full creative potential of each individual, as guaranteed by the country's Constitution, which stipulates in Article 19, Section 3:

"Free from exploitation, oppression and economic dependence, every citizen has equal rights and manifold



opportunities to develop his abilities to the full extent and to unfold his talents in socialist society unhindered, in free decision, for the welfare of society and for his own benefit."

## 10 People's Culture

Professor Lea Grundig invited me to a meeting in Bautzen, a town of 44,000, whose biggest employer is VEB Waggonbau, with 3,000 employees. They make freight and passenger railroad cars and they are the main pillar of the town's cultural life. This cultural life was the chief reason I accepted the invitation.

I wanted to explore two special aspects about culture in the GDR. The one I considered most important was how the people's culture had developed after the defeat of fascism. The Nazis had destroyed and perverted the entire German cultural heritage, that of bourgeois democratic humanism as well as the working-class culture, which had developed magnificent artistic expression, including that of such world renowned cultural giants as graphic artist Kaethe Kollwitz, poet-playwright Bertolt Brecht, composer Hanns Eisler and many others.

My other aim was to probe the recurring charge made in capitalist countries that there was a lack of artistic freedom in the GDR.

Interestingly, the GDR Constitution gives a lead to the answers to both questions. Unlike even the most advanced bourgeois democratic constitutions, it takes time to define the cultural policy of the state. Article 18 of the GDR Constitution provides:

"Socialist national culture is one of the foundations of socialist society. The German Democratic Republic fosters and protects socialist culture, which serves peace, humanism and the development of socialist society. It combats imperialist anti-culture, which serves psychological warfare and the degradation of man. Socialist society



promotes the cultural life of the working people, cultivates humanist values of the national cultural heritage and of world culture, and develops socialist national culture as the concern of the whole people."

Professor Grundig and VEB Waggonbau were good ways of exploring the application of this provision.

About two dozen people had crowded into a conference room when we arrived. They were representatives of various departments at Waggonbau that were particularly active in cultural life, and they had been given time off with pay to attend the meeting. "If we had opened it for general attendance," the chairman said, "we would have had to close down production and hold it in our biggest hall. Interest in cultural matters is very great and our workers would not miss a chance to meet with Professor Grundig. They all know her and they like the way she gets to the crux of matters."

Professor Lea Grundig, who died in 1977, was a longtime Communist, an artist and a member of the Central Committee of the SED. All her life the cultural development of the working class was her central concern. Born into a Jewish family in Dresden in 1906, she studied art and, in 1927, married artist Hans Grundig. Both members of the Communist Party, they put their artistic talents fully at the disposal of the working-class movement. When the fascists took over, their energies were devoted to the struggle against fascism. They were arrested in 1936 and again in 1938, Lea was released on condition that she emigrate to Palestine while Hans remained in prisons and concentration camps until he was forced into a convict battalion near the end of the war and made his escape to the Red Army. As a result of these hardships, he contracted tuberculosis and died in 1958.

Lea, after her return to Dresden, devoted much of her time to the cultural education of the working people. "In the early fifties," she recalled, "I used to take peasants to art exhibits. We'd go in trucks, the only transportation

available, and they always dressed as if they were going to church. I was trying to make them feel at home, to take the mystery out of art. I would show them pictures relating to farm work. I will never forget how happy I was when one offered a criticism. 'A real wheatfield is much more beautiful,' he said."

The days of reticence about cultural matters are over thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the trade unions, the artists and the state. Thanks to this effort, cultural activities have increasingly become a part of trade union life. Workers collectives, competing for the title Socialist Labor Team, gradually included cultural activities in their plans and by 1972, it encompassed 87 percent of all teams. That same year trade union elections were held, which are always preceded by discussions during which proposals to improve working and living conditions are made. During this discussion 230,000 proposals for improvement of cultural life were made according to a report by Kurt Hager, member of the SED Politbureau of the Central Committee in July of that year.<sup>1</sup>

This universal interest did not develop on its own. A huge effort was required. It started in the Soviet Zone of Germany right after the victory over fascism, with the active support of the Soviet occupation powers.

The initial aim was to overcome the degenerate morass created by fascism, to resurrect the humanist and democratic traditions of the past and to acquaint the people with the anti-fascist works that had flourished in exile and had, in defiance of the torturers, found expression even in prisons and concentration camps.

In pre-Hitler days, culture largely had been the property of the bourgeoisie and middle classes, though there had been also a tradition of proletarian culture of which Hans and Lea Grundig were prominent participants. But, even during the Weimar Republic period, their efforts reached only the most progressive sections of the working class. The majority of the working people never had



access to more than workers' singing or folk dance societies and workers' sports and hiking clubs.

"The human need for art..."

It was therefore necessary, side by side with the restoration of the humanist cultural heritage, to create a new place for culture and art in society, so that the lives of *all* the people could be enriched.

Professor Grundig outlined the basic theme of the role of art in socialist society in a speech accepting an honorary degree at the University of Greifswald, in October, 1972. She said:

"Art has the power to break the confines of individuality and to convey to us the nature of other times and other peoples. Other being can be experienced, beyond knowledge, and with human emotion and identification accomplished through art. Art offers the communication which links all peoples, because it is a testimony of humanity about itself and about life – that means about society and nature. Even if we can comprehend the art of other people only incompletely, because we lack knowledge of them and their history, we will still have vicarious impressions that may not impart knowledge but do create emotional identification.

"If our socialist society did not have the conviction that there is a deep human need for art, our cultural policy would be without basis, our efforts to develop people's art senseless. The opportunity to develop a rounded, fully developed personality is not just for a few. In socialist society, for the first time in history, it is possible for everyone. Of course, receptivity of art is not equally distributed. As in all phases of life, individual abilities and determination vary. The amateur people's art we promote has the predominant task of developing and enriching the personality. . .

"Under no circumstances must we permit – as frequently happens – a differentiation in the appreciation between amateur and professional art. Art is art, no matter who created it, if it is real art and not merely artistic exercise. There must be no ambiguous standards, only unequivocal ones: high quality of intellectual content and form, content and form an organic unity."<sup>2</sup>

This brings me back to our reason for coming to Bautzen. "People have to be trained to understand and appreciate art," Professor Grundig told me. "It is a difficult process. A few years ago the union at Waggonbau called me and asked me to attend a meeting. It appeared they had run into difficulty with a young artist. He had come to Bautzen right from art school, under a sponsorship agreement with the plant's union. They commissioned him make a sculpture. He did, but the union members were dissatisfied. I was urgently invited to attend the meeting at which this was to be discussed."

The young man had produced a statue of a nude family group, and the workers took exception to it.

"The hall was filled to the rafters," Professor Grundig said. "The workers knew very well what they liked and what they didn't, though they found it difficult to put into words. Finally an older worker, red with indignation, got up and said, 'I looked at myself in the mirror, nude, and nobody looks like that.' The problem was that the young man had produced a parody, with vastly exaggerated sex organs, and the workers found it offensive, though he had thought it particularly clever. Though I did not interfere too much, it was a good opportunity to teach a little about the nature of art."

One interesting aspect of the affair was that the artist was not fired. A union steward at the meeting told me that he was kept on, because people "do make mistakes and after discussing the matter we decided that this really showed how much he needed our collective." He ad-



ded with satisfaction that the young artist had "developed well since then and does good work, not only for us but also for the Bautzen city council."

An important step in the process of making art part of the lives of working people came in 1959, when a conference of industrial and cultural workers was held at the Electrochemical Works in Bitterfeld. It was attended by many important cultural and trade-union personalities and was considered of such basic importance that the late Walter Ulbricht, first secretary of the SED, took part in the deliberations, which were to discuss the basic cultural tasks in building socialism.

The conference established the need for close cooperation between artists and working people in industry and agriculture in order to stimulate the creative potential of the masses, and called on workers to "reach for the pen because socialist culture needs you."

This conference ushered in a new era for cultural activities characterized by the development of large scale amateur activities in all forms of artistic endeavor under the sponsorship of the trade unions.

In the summer of 1959, the first Workers' Cultural Festival was held, and 10,000 amateur and 5,000 professional artists participated. This movement grew by leaps and bounds. In five years, people's art groups had increased to 21,000 - among them 5,000 choral groups, 350 film studios, 2,000 theaters and 80 symphony orchestras. By 1975, participation in these groups had risen to 1.3 million and it keeps increasing from year to year.

Not only does the number of people engaged in such activities increase but the quality of their work also improves. This, too, has been a long and difficult process.

"In the mid-fifties I was once asked to come to the building site of a new chemical plant, where the people spent their free time playing cards or painting," Professor Grundig recalls. "When I got there, they had a regular art exhibit in one of the barracks. Most of the

pictures turned out to be copies of nourishing still lives with wine bottles, or romantic landscapes. It was the time when good food was still not plentiful. People had transferred their dream world into pictures. They had used painting as a refuge from reality, and their pictures had no relation to their own lives but were trashy and conventional ideas of a good life.

"Only two little drawings were different. Someone had drawn the scraggy little tree in front of the barracks and had fallen in love with its branches and experienced joy from them. It was hard to say anything, but I tried to explain that beauty can only be created from reality, from the recognition of reality and in relation to it."

## Culture in plant and office

By now artistic standards in many of the groups are high, though union officials concerned with cultural matters still complain sometimes about the lack of creative approaches. There is a large number of amateur groups that command respect throughout the country and even beyond its borders. The choir of the Mansfeld miners has turned out popular records, several amateur theaters are in great demand and special love is lavished on amateur satirical variety shows that "tell it like it is."

When these groups have engagements, they are given the necessary time off from work, with pay, and they are financed by the unions.

While artistic standards are high, the purpose of this movement is not talent scouting. It does sometimes happen that a worker becomes a full-time artist, but the main goal of the movement is to develop the creative activities of all participants, to assure everyone a richer, more rounded life.

The extent of these activities, and the interaction they create between people at the point of production and the



community was illustrated at the VEB Waggonbau meeting. The men and women present reported on a large variety of activities, including an orchestra, an amateur movie group, a stamp collector's circle, oil painting, writers' workshop, literature forums, a wood parquetry workshop as well as a political satire cabaret.

The cabaret, led by the director of VEB Waggonbau's vocational school, won first prize during the 1973 World Youth Festival in Berlin. "Most of the members are apprentices," he said. "They don't pull any punches, either."

A worker from the carpentry shop was one of the leading lights in the parquetry group. "We all know how to work with wood," he said. "So several members of our department got interested in inlay work. That's an example of it," he said pointing to an inlaid portrait of Wilhelm Pieck, first president of the German Democratic Republic.

In addition to these activities, in which people from the community can participate, there is much interaction with the town's cultural institutions.

Bautzen has a municipal repertory theater, and workers from the plant take part in its advisory council. "Our plant has a friendship agreement with the theater," a council member told us. "There are monthly meetings between members of the theater ensemble and representatives of our workers. Workers not only attend the theater, they also take a hand in discussing the suitability of plays, advise on program schedule and such things.

"The advisory council is headed by a former VEB Waggonbau worker. He is the main link between the theater and the community. Another important public activity is the monthly office hour of actors. During that time members of the community are welcome to discuss problems of the theater and to air their views."

The spectacular success in bringing working-class audiences into the theater has occasioned a critical com-

parison in the West German illustrated mass circulation weekly *Der Stern*.<sup>3</sup> In it author Erich Kuby writes that in the FRG "taxes from the great majority who never get to the theater because they cannot pay for the tickets or because they lack the educational prerequisites, pay for the pleasure of a small upper crust (in theater subsidies). In the GDR 30 percent of the audience are workers..." The reason for this, Kuby says, is that "the Trade Union Federation in the GDR is a sort of giant cultural-political educational institution. It has realized that particularly the theater, in its dual nature of entertainment and moral-political establishment, is ideally suited to lead working people to cultural pursuits and 'educate' them."

In addition to the establishment of a new relationship between workers and community there is also a new relationship between artists and their audiences. At the Bautzen Waggonbau plant, a woman worker spoke at length about efforts to acquaint users of the plant's library with new works of fiction and poetry. Readers' forums are held regularly, she reported, at which authors read from new - often from yet unpublished - manuscripts. "There is always a lot of discussion and quite often criticism is offered."

Increasingly, long-range relationships develop between artists and workers' collectives. At the giant petrochemical plant in Schwedt, I was told that an older painter, who lives in town, has established firm ties with the plant. They commission works for use in their plant - a mural for the dining room, an oil painting for a meeting room. For these works, he discusses sketches with groups of workers in an effort to avoid such a situation as arose in Bautzen, but even when he does other work, not commissioned by the plant, he invites workers in regularly for studio discussions. "There are sometimes very heated confrontations," the plant paper's editor told me. "Sometimes the workers' view prevails; other times, the artist



can persuade his audience about the considerations involved and of the artistic process, and thus helps in the job of teaching art appreciations. Whatever the outcome, everybody benefits. Of course, occasionally errors in judgment are made. It is the process of development of the artist and his audience that is important."

Accomplishing such broad participation in culture is a laborious process. One way to spread cultural pursuits among the workers is the inclusion of a cultural program as one of the criteria in the competition for the title "Socialist Labor Team." This title is not only an honor, it also carries financial rewards.

An example was the plan of the Bertolt Brecht Socialist Labor Team at the Erfurt Body Works, where bodies for heavy industrial machinery are made.

"It is our goal to develop a many-sided and interesting cultural life, in accordance with the needs and wishes of the members of our union group," the team's resolution said. "Our cultural and educational plan is designed to help create socialist personalities." Their plan included such highlights as Brecht's 75th birthday in February 1973, May Day, World Youth Festival in Berlin, the 24th anniversary of the GDR, as well as plantwide cultural competitions.

In addition, the team set itself the following tasks: To conduct a school of socialist labor, which will discuss political, economic and cultural questions, with the support of an instructor, the personnel manager of the plant. Study of Lenin's work, *The Great Initiative*. Discussion at union meetings of the most significant cultural events in the course of the year. Together with team members in the Free German Youth, overtime work was to be arranged in order to raise funds in support of the World Youth Festival.<sup>4</sup>

Responsibility for this development does not rest with the artists and the unions. It is anchored also in the

country's economic plans. The 1976-1980 Five Year Plan, submitted by the Ninth Congress of the SED and adopted by the People's Chamber, takes these needs into account. Under the heading "Development of the material and cultural standard of life of the people," the plan provides that state expenditures for the purpose of raising the "educational and cultural level of the working class" and the population as a whole be raised to 129-131 percent as compared with the 1971-1975 period.

"When speaking of culture and cultural tasks in the developed socialist society," Kurt Hager writes, "we do not mean some narrowly restricted field. It is a matter of the totality of living conditions, of material and intellectual values, ideas and knowledge through the acquisition of which the people - in community with others - become able, cultured and convinced builders of socialism, genuine socialist personalities. . ."<sup>5</sup>

In our era, cultural activities are one of the main arenas of struggle between the two systems. This is the struggle for people's minds and hearts. As Hermann Axen, a member of the SED Politbureau pointed out, "Surmounting the material basis of capitalism is a comparatively rapid and all-embracing process. Surmounting bourgeois ideology and morality, however, and the vestiges of capitalism in people's minds, is a continuous process. . . The imperialist subversive centers make use of these retrograde and reactionary ideas in the minds of certain people. . . even in the developed socialist society there are people with backward and hostile outlooks. This will be inevitable as long as two opposite social systems exist in the world, as long as class struggle is what determines the meaning of the world's development."<sup>6</sup>



## "The struggle for minds and hearts"

In the realm of culture, this struggle on one hand involves the search for forms of expression appropriate to the new society. This search is carried on with broad experimentation and ongoing criticism.

On the other hand, there are expressions of attitudes hostile to socialism, which must be answered.

A good example of the freedom of experimentation and broad critical examination of artistic work was the Eighth Art Exhibit of the GDR, held in Dresden from October 1977 to April 1978. This huge exhibit offered selections made during the preceding 18 months from district-wide exhibitions.

I was particularly struck by two aspects of the event. One was the extent of the popular discussion, the other the large number of works on the theme of international solidarity.

The show, during its six months run, had over a million visitors, including many groups from plants and offices. Free-wheeling discussions were presented by all the media, discussions with critics, artists, workers, viewers, artist's subjects – a cross section of the population. What a change from the time when Professor Grundig took peasants to art exhibits and found it hard to get them to talk!

The pros and cons of many individual works were heatedly debated; there was praise and criticism, and much discussion about the role of art in society.

After the exhibition closed, the Ministry of Information published a 300-page paperback with reviews, observations, discussions and visitors' opinions collected from the journalistic media. It was a giant, country-wide course in art appreciation.

When I shared my impressions with a friend who accompanied me, she attributed the large number of works dealing with international solidarity to the fact that "our

people have a real feeling for this. It is not that the juries made a point of selecting such works. The struggle against fascist ideology during the past decades has really raised a deep consciousness of solidarity with other peoples among our population and that is what you see reflected here." To my critical views on some of the experimental work, she replied, "Much of this may not be great art nor a great contribution toward a socialist style of expression. But the important thing is that it is so broad, that such a variety of things are shown. One cannot legislate art. This breadth of expression helps educate the population's grasp of art and makes them true critics."

Poet-playwright Bertolt Brecht once summed up this attitude when he said: "No government can permit itself to be intimidated by a work of art which generates poison. But woe to it, if it mistakes medicine for poison."<sup>7</sup>

The difficulty is to distinguish between medicine and poison, a differentiation not always easy. Here, again, the GDR Constitution gives guidelines. Its Article 18 deals exclusively with the development of culture in its broadest sense, something no bourgeois democratic constitution does. It says that socialist culture "serves peace, humanism and the development of socialist society. It combats imperialist anti-culture, which serves psychological warfare and the degradation of man."

It becomes the task of the cultural community – publishers, theater directors, film producers and artists' associations – to guard against violations. This means in practice that the dissemination of racist, anti-Semitic, warmongering and chauvinistic material is in violation of the Constitution.

There have been such violations and the perpetrators have been prevented from getting audiences for their work; and some were prosecuted in accordance with existing laws.



The most notorious of these "dissident" cases in recent years has been that of song writer-singer Wolf Biermann.

In 1976 he was invited to Cologne, in the FRG, to perform at a televised rally. Among the songs he presented – all of which were critical of existing socialism – was this one:

"The German darkness  
Descends over my spirit  
It darkens overpowering in my song  
It comes because I see my Germany  
So deeply torn."

"What has descended over this poet's spirit is, unfortunately, the influence of those who aim to restore 'one Germany,'" Elaine Mensh and Harry Mensh write in their book. "In fact, these lines from 'The German darkness descends' by Wolf Biermann aptly express the sentiments of FRG reactionaries. . ."<sup>8</sup>

Prior to that FRG performance, Biermann had, for years, expressed negative views of the development of the GDR and reviled its working class. Therefore, in line with the constitutional directive, his songs were no longer recorded and he received only rare singing engagements. On the other hand, his songs were recorded and sold in the FRG, and the FRG media prominently reprinted his utterances criticizing the GDR.

After the Cologne concert his GDR citizenship was revoked in accordance with a 1967 law providing that this can be done for gross violation of citizens' duties. His personal property was shipped to him, and his family were offered the option of following him.

Subsequently, a few other artists left the GDR to seek their fortunes in the West, some on long-term visas and others forever. Their choice bears out Axen's view about individuals hostile to socialism even in a developed socialist society as long as the two systems exist side by side.

The question raised by Brecht on the need to counter poison, while not mistaking medicine for it, is a difficult one and, no doubt, sometimes mistakes occur. This question was dealt with by author Irmtraud Morgner in another way. Born in 1933, she is one of the most prominent and controversial authors of the post-World War II era, and she deals in a challenging manner with the role of women in society. In an interview in the weekly *Fuer Dich* (For You), she characterized the problem in the following manner:

"We should not be deterred in our critical examination by our adversaries' views. On the contrary. Our enemies fight existing socialism not because it still has shortcomings. They fight it all the harder, the fewer its shortcomings."



## 11 Half of Humanity

"When my son asks me why we don't live with his daddy the way other children do, I explain to him that I think it's better to live apart rather than have fights and tension at home. We are on friendly terms with his father and he sees him regularly," Rose Bauer told me. A woman in her mid-thirties, she is a skilled worker at the Narva electric-bulb works in Berlin. Her son is 14 years old. She has worked at Narva for 20 years, starting as an unskilled worker when she left school after the eighth grade.

After her son started school, she decided to complete her education "so that I could help him with his school work" and finished ninth and tenth grades in evening school. She also qualified as a skilled worker. During that period, she got two days a week off from work, with pay, to devote to her training. Later she decided to qualify as a forelady in a one-year evening school. She says that her son's teacher told her that he expresses pride in his mother's accomplishments.

Steffi Gerlach became pregnant as the result of a casual affair. She decided to have an abortion "but I changed my mind at the very last minute. I just couldn't go through with it." She is a Ph. D. in physics, and works at a research institute. "I had considered the abortion because I thought a child would interfere with my career. . . . For the first two years I put her in an all-week nursery and only took her home on weekends. It is easier for single mothers to get a place in these all-week nurseries, but then I realized that I saw too little of her and placed her in a day nursery."



By law, single parents have a number of advantages. Among them are preferential admission to child-care facilities and preferential allocation of housing. But even more striking than the official support is the changed popular attitude toward single mothers.

Both women said that they do not encounter social ostracism or censure. "There may be some old people who still feel it's shameful to be a single mother," Rose Bauer conceded, "but they rarely express it. It would be a very unpopular view."

An expectant mother told me that her colleagues at work "seem to show special respect for me since I am pregnant and they offer all kinds of help because I am alone." An unmarried woman in her mid-thirties said that her friends and co-workers encourage her to have a child. "They realize I won't get married and say that a child would give me greater satisfaction in my personal life."

This is an astounding change in a country whose literature abounds with tragic tales of the fate of unwed mothers. It also contrasts sharply with their fate in the FRG. There, I was told by several women, single mothers have great difficulty in finding apartments because they are considered "poor risks," and their children suffer all kinds of social indignities. All the single mothers I met in the FRG spoke of a pervading sense of insecurity, and most of them had acute financial difficulties.

Not one of the GDR mothers felt insecure or mentioned financial problems; when questioned about their finances, most of them said that a family with just one wage earner cannot afford many luxuries, though they can get along. On the other hand, most mentioned with appreciation the help offered by unions to the children of their members. Rose Bauer enumerated the children's programs offered by the union at Narva. "Starting with the fifth grade, the children can all go to the union's summer camp for three weeks each year. It's a very nice

camp and it costs only 12 marks, everything included." That is less than it would cost to buy food for a child at home for one week. "Since he's been 12, he has also been going there for two-week winter vacations. All children receive a Christmas present each year and families with three or more children get an annual check for 60 marks to buy books. The union also organizes theater and concert visits for our children."

Women's equality is one of the basic measures of a society's progress, and while the status of single mothers is not the central issue, it indicates the extent to which inequities have been overcome.

These basic inequities are the economic and educational discrimination to which women are subjected, a discrimination that persists despite constitutional provisions for equality in most industrialized countries, though the United States — in 1981 — is still debating the merits of such legislation.

The situation of women in the FRG was described in a series of articles in 1979, in the Bonn Social Democratic paper *Vorwaerts*: "Twenty-five years ago a decision of the Karlsruhe Supreme Court (of the FRG) affirmed the principle of equality between men and women," the paper wrote. "But the reality still looks different. . . Women still earn up to a third less than men, although they perform equal or comparable work. Women holding top jobs in political and economic life are still rare. On the other hand, half of all unemployed are women, even though their share of the labor force is only one-third. The list of disadvantages and discrimination can be continued indefinitely. . . Despite decades of constitutional assurances we are, in fact, centuries removed from actual equality between men and women."<sup>1</sup>

In the GDR, socialism has made remarkable strides in realizing the promise of its Constitution. It supplemented *de jure* equality with the awareness that legislation is not



enough. Otto Grotewohl, the country's first prime minister, said, "Constitutional guarantees are illusory if they are not based on social and economic conditions which make their realization possible. However, such conditions don't fall from the sky; they must be created. If these guarantees are to be effective, they must be realized, and the first task of state power is to create economic and political conditions to make the realization of these rights possible."

### To realize *de facto* equality

Steps toward women's equality were taken in the first phase of the anti-fascist, democratic reconstruction in the Soviet Zone. Among them was the realization of a long-standing demand of the labor movement for equal pay for women. Most women old enough to remember frequently talk about that day – August 17, 1946 – when the Soviet occupation authorities decreed that women and young workers should be paid equal wages for equal work.

Grotewohl's injunction about the need to create material conditions for equality took the form of one of the first laws to be passed by the new legislature. It was the "Mother and Child Protection and Women's Rights Act," enacted in September 1950. It coupled state aid for the family with provisions to advance toward job equality by providing for the establishment of state-supported child-care facilities, state aid for families with many children, and creating an 11-week paid maternity leave. It also set the basis for the promotion of women on the job.

Implementation of these goals was not simple. The economic preconditions had to be created. In 1949, the country had 173 kindergarten and eight nursery school places for every 1,000 children. Nurseries care for chil-

dren from the termination of maternity leave to three years of age and kindergartens are for those three to six years old, at which age they enter school. Three decades later, nursery places were available for more than 60 percent of the nursery-age children and there were sufficient kindergarten places to fill the need. What is more, the law provides that working mothers unable to place a child in a nursery will be given a leave of absence until the child is placed and, depending on need, a state subsidy is provided the mother. For children from the first to fourth grade, after-school-care is available. All these services are underwritten by the state. Parents pay only a small share of the cost of the food served. This is more than offset by the monthly subsidy the state pays to parents for all children under 16.

Today it is widely acknowledged that pre-school children's institutions not only free the mothers to work but that they are an important aid in the child's development. Dr. Alfred Katzenstein, a Berlin psychologist, told me that tests had shown that the children who had attended pre-school institutions were better equipped to handle educational requirements.

Having society assume such widespread responsibilities for the children's welfare was one of the preconditions for real equality. Another was to overcome the educational lag inherited from the past.

"When I was young," Dr. Johanna Toepfer, deputy chairperson of the Free German Trade Unions, told me, "girls from working-class homes had little chance to learn a trade. When I was 16 and had finished school, I very much wanted to attend a vocational school. My grades were good and I was considered a bright girl. But tuition was 10 marks a month. So my father said, 'What's the use? She will marry and quit anyway. She should get a job and start earning, so she can contribute to the household. The boys can learn a trade.' That was a widely accepted attitude. There were not many apprenticeship



places for girls, and most families were satisfied if a girl took some unskilled job just so she could bring home a few marks. I started working for the railroad, cleaning cars. My chance came only after 1945, when young women workers were encouraged to get an education. I took all the opportunities offered, but it took me years to catch up. At the time, I already had a family to care for. I sometimes tell young women how lucky they are, but of course they take their right to an education for granted, and that's how it should be."

### Top jobs for women

Statistics bear out the great strides made. A survey, conducted in 1971, established the vocational and professional training for men and women in different age groups. It showed that among those 50 to 60 years of age, 77.6 percent of the men and 34.2 percent of the women had such training. Among those over 60 years, the number of those with training declined and the gap between men and women widened. But among those 20 to 30 years of age, the gap had almost closed, and the ratio was 84.1 percent for men against 78.2 percent for women.<sup>2</sup> By 1977, the inequity had been overcome. That year only 2.5 percent of all graduates from the 10-year public school were not scheduled for further training and among the women graduates 99 percent were signed up for apprenticeship or further schooling.

Sometimes the argument is made that women's equality in socialist countries is wanting because their number in leading government and political positions is small. This is readily admitted as still being a problem. Again and again I was told that there are many women in administrative and managerial positions but few in the top jobs.

Examining this, it has to be kept in mind that the po-

sition of women under socialism nevertheless compares favorably with any capitalist country, because they have a much broader base in executive and managerial jobs.

At the end of the seventies, women in the GDR held 33.6 percent of the seats in the People's Chamber and nearly 40 percent of those in district and county legislatures. Every fourth mayor and 45 percent of all judges were women and they occupied a third of all administrative functions in institutions of higher learning.

During the same period, only 7.5 percent of the FRG's Bundestag deputies were women, and overall, women held only 16.2 percent of the managerial and supervisory jobs.

Dr. Johanna Toepfer is very frank on this point. She told me that there is still much more to be done to promote women to leading positions. "In the unions we have virtually solved the problem," she said. "Women make up half of our membership and hold about half of all union functions. Not only as elected officials at the point of production but on all levels of union activity."

By 1976-1977, the FDGB executive board, the unions' highest council, had women in 45 percent of its posts. To achieve this, Dr. Toepfer said, a very special effort had been made. "We have a university-level training school for top officials and it is centralized. But to attract women with families we organize extension courses in each district." She is proud of these good results in the unions but admitted that the situation was less favorable in industrial and trade management.

By comparison, the position of women in FRG unions is pitiful. A survey of women's positions in European Community countries reports that "in the early 1970s the German Trade Union Federation had organized only 13 percent of the working women. At present (in 1979) it is 19 percent."<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1970s in the GDR, every sixth executive position in industrial and agricultural management was held by a woman, but there were few in top jobs. They



were deputies, the second in command. Official awareness of this problem was expressed in the report by General Secretary Erich Honecker to the Ninth Congress of the SED in 1976. He spoke of the need to "... progressively solve the problems which determine whether a woman is able or not to make use of her equal rights to the fullest extent."<sup>4</sup>

An interesting effort to train leadership cadre was described in the illustrated magazine, *Fuer Dich*.<sup>5</sup>

The institute of the Construction and Building Ceramics industry found that only one third of the managerial employees participating in annual training seminars were women. They decided to take special measures. They organized a one-week seminar for women employees with children. To make attendance possible for employees who had no other child-care facilities, they made arrangements for children to come along. They arranged to hold the seminar at one of their trade union resorts and made provisions with the local school and kindergarten to take the children on a short-term basis. They transformed a large room into a playroom and hired a teacher for after-school hours. As it turned out, 21 of the 26 participants were able to make other arrangements, relying on husbands and other relatives. But five of the women could not have taken advantage of the seminar had they not been able to take their children along.

### Many steps to affirmative action

Such special efforts are in line with the affirmative action provisions for women incorporated in the Labor Code of 1977 which calls, in paragraph 30, section 1, for "measures to encourage the creative abilities of women at the place of work, for their political and professional competence and for their systematic preparation for leading positions..."

Inge Lange, candidate member of the SED's Political Bureau, in a speech to SED functionaries, urged that energetic measures be taken to assure greater promotion of women to leading jobs, lest their insufficient participation in top positions be accepted and viewed as unavoidable. "We understand that the realization of this task is still difficult," she said, "particularly in relation to the demands this places on the family and on women's social function as mothers. Unfortunately, there are still a good number of husbands who persist in burdening women with the main responsibility for the family..."

"There are also collectives who are behind the times. This shows up, for example, when a father wants to stay home with a sick child. In many places, there is still little understanding for this.

"This situation often makes very highly qualified women hesitate to undertake tasks commensurate with their abilities. It is therefore necessary to more energetically further this development and help overcome conditions which deter women from undertaking leading positions in accord with their knowledge and ability."

The state undertakes many efforts to minimize these problems arising from women's dual role as creative workers and mothers. The creation of child-care institutions was an important step. Another was the law to legalize abortions, passed in 1972. It provides for abortions on demand in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. They are free and subject to all conditions of paid sick leave. It is interesting that this was one of the few laws not publicly discussed. "We involved the medical profession and the women's organizations," a parliamentarian told me. "We felt that this was a decision which had to be made by the concerned women."

Another important step to ease women's double role came in 1976, when paid maternity leave was increased to 26 weeks. In addition, mothers were given the right to a leave of absence during the first year of the baby's



life. During that time the mother enjoys all benefits of her work contract and is, for example, entitled to her paid vacations. The law also directs the employer "to create conditions to enable women to utilize this time to improve their job qualification."<sup>6</sup>

This measure offers an interesting example of the distribution of time made available by increased productivity. Instead of cutting the workforce or decreasing the workweek across the board, a good part of the newly found time was invested in this measure to benefit mother and child.

There are also other special provisions that give extra time with pay to working women. There is, for example, the monthly "household day," which applies to married women, women with children under 16 and single women over 40. It also applies to single fathers. When a strong argument was made in favor of making this household day universal, because young single women and men also have household chores, they were told that the time is not yet ripe for giving every worker 12 days off with pay each year in addition to their vacations and the other time off they are entitled to for various purposes.

I have often wondered if the time off with pay provided for vacations, maternity leave, household days, study, and participation in legislative and other public activities, as well as for contingencies of everyday life from moving to funerals, does not give the workers a shorter workweek than in developed capitalist countries. I have never seen any calculation along these lines. But it is certain that increased productivity under socialism always results in advantages to the workers, as was again shown at the beginning of 1979, when all workers received a three-day increase in their paid vacations.

The introduction of the "baby year" brought a baby boom beyond expectations. In 1977, the birthrate shot up 14.1 percent, as compared with 1976. Even though an increased birthrate had been anticipated in the plan-

ning, this plethora surpassed expectations and caused a shortage in baby products, as well as production problems in many industries because of the large number of women on leave. The following year, births leveled off to 4.1 percent above the 1977 bumper crop.

I started this chapter on the struggle for women's equality with the position of single parents because the callous attitude toward this group in developed capitalist countries illustrates that system's lack of concern for women's rights and welfare. This, however, does not mean that socialism is unconcerned with the development of the family.

"It is true that the divorce rate in our country is high," a sociology student told me. "This is because women no longer have to marry for economic reasons or because of social pressure. But young people think a lot about the nature of socialist marriage, a marriage in which love, understanding and mutual respect are the criteria of life together. I think we are in the process of developing such a new relationship, but it takes time, and there is more to it than sharing the shopping and the care for the children."

Rita Kaminski, a divorcee with a school-age daughter, also gave me an insight on the new morality. She was a specialist in animal husbandry on the Dorf Mecklenburg farm in one of the country's formerly most backward regions. I asked her if she encountered any difficulties in the village community, where everyone knows everyone else. She said that she was fully accepted and was given help by her neighbors in many ways. "I tell people, if the occasion arises, that I think it is immoral to live with a man if the relationship lacks love and understanding," she said. "This is one of the accomplishments of our country, that we have created a new basis for marriage."

The program of the SED sums up this new relationship. "As the socialist mode of life is developed more and more fully," it says, "it also leaves its mark on the



patterns of married life and family life, which are founded on love and mutual respect, understanding and mutual aid in everyday life and shared responsibility in the upbringing of children.

"The full equality of husband and wife, the increasing economic independence of women and the ever greater opportunities offered them to play a full and equal part in social life have created qualitatively new conditions for the personal ties established by contracting a marriage and starting a family."<sup>7</sup>

## 12 Routing Racism and Anti-Semitism

My first conscious political experience was the boycott of Jewish stores on April 1, 1933, two months after the Nazis had been handed power in Germany.

Jewish stores were closed that day. To identify them, the Nazis smeared Stars of David and anti-Semitic epithets on their fronts and the legend, "Don't buy Jewish." I remember the uniformed fascists strutting around the streets, and seeing the broken windows and vandalized property. It was the beginning of the road that led to extermination camps. It was my first encounter with the meaning of racism.

After finding refuge in the United States, I learned about its own brand of racism as well as its covert anti-Semitism, and eventually I came to understand these as tools of imperialism, with many forms but only one end – to divide the people's forces and to extract superprofits.

The end of World War II brought an enormous upsurge in the struggle against racism and colonialism. It was reflected in the changes that occurred in the United Nations and in its increasingly determined actions against racism and colonial oppression.

In this changing world, how the heritage of racism and anti-Semitism was dealt with in the two German states that had emerged after World War II was of burning interest to me.

On November 10, 1978, a capacity crowd – about 700 people – gathered at the Peace Temple Synagogue on invitation of the Berlin Jewish congregation to mark the 40th anniversary of the fascist pogrom that became known as the "Crystal Night." The Peace Temple Syna-



gogue, in Berlin's old Prenzlauer Berg section, had just been renovated to its pre-Hitler splendor by the Berlin city administration, at a cost of 600,000 marks.

In addition to a solemn religious service and an address by the congregation's chairman, there was an exhibit organized on the synagogue premises by the Museum of German History which documented the persecution of Jews in the years 1933 to 1945.

The event was attended by many prominent persons, including State Secretary for Church Affairs Hans Seigewasser, Chairman of the Christian Democratic Party Gerald Goetting, General Secretary of the GDR Peace Council Werner Ruempel, as well as numerous artists, journalists and many members of the organization of resistance fighters. There were also delegations from Jewish congregations in other socialist countries.

Many young people in their late teens or early twenties followed the service with silent respect. Since the Berlin Jewish congregation has 340 members, it was clear that the majority of those in attendance had come to signify their solidarity with the Jewish people and to demonstrate their rejection of their country's infamous past.

Memorial activities throughout the country were numerous. Public gatherings were held in all major cities by both Jewish and Christian congregations, with the support of public organizations.

Memorial wreaths were laid at 750 sites to commemorate the murder of six million Jews from every country of Europe. Secretary of State Seigewasser laid a wreath at Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, where he had been interned during his eleven-year incarceration from 1934 to 1945 for his part in the anti-Hitler resistance. As a member of the clandestine anti-fascist camp committee, he had been able to save the lives of a number of Jews marked for extermination.

The 40th anniversary was also widely recalled in the

media. Films, television, and radio programs, and newspaper and magazine articles were offered. Among the television programs was a replay of a three-part series adapted from a book by Peter Edel, a Jewish graphic artist and author who describes the lives and suffering of Jews under the fascist yoke. Edel, who holds the Karl Marx medal – the nation's highest honor – and the national prize for literature, was also featured at a memorial meeting of the GDR League for Culture at which he read from his autobiography. Youth forums were held in many schools and factories, where anti-fascist resistance fighters – Jewish and non-Jewish – discussed this ignominious phase of German history.

A letter, published throughout the country, was addressed to the Presidium of the Federation of Jewish Congregations by Erich Honecker, Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers and General Secretary of the SED. In it he pointed out that the socialist GDR has "forever destroyed the soil of reaction" and has become "a secure homestead of humanism and progress which guarantees all its citizens equal participation in society's life."

Honecker recalled an appeal published shortly after the "Crystal Night" by the illegal Communist Party "against the shame of the anti-Jewish pogroms." It characterized the "anti-Semitism and racism of the fascists as part of the preparations for the imperialist war of conquest" and called for the broadest solidarity with the victims.

The decisive step in routing anti-Semitism and all other forms of racism and national chauvinism is, as Honecker pointed out, ending exploitation of man by man, but that is merely the basis. In addition, an energetic and consistent struggle must be waged to destroy the old prejudices.



## How the super-race "theory" was concocted

Anti-Semitism had been a weapon of the German rulers long before Germany emerged as a nation. For centuries, Jews had been persecuted on the basis of their religion. Historical records show that 38 Jews were publicly burned in Berlin in 1510 for allegedly desecrating church sacramental objects and in 1571, Jews were driven from the Mark Brandenburg Duchy. It was not until 1812 that Jews in Prussia were accorded citizenship rights.

While anti-Semitism was an old means of diverting popular discontent and creating a scapegoat, it was left to rising imperialism to imbue it with a racist content. Among the first works propounding this view was a tract by Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904), published in Bern in 1879, entitled "The Victory of Jewry over Teutonic People." The authors of *Jews under the Swastika* write about Marr's thesis: "He developed an entirely new variant [of anti-Semitism] which was copied later by the Hitler fascists and by all anti-Semitic ideologies – namely the fairy tale of a 'world power' of Jews. It alleged that Jews had developed as 'the first great dominant power in Western society' during the 19th century and were 'poised to become the socio-political dictator of Germany . . . without bloodshed, in fact after centuries of political persecution.'"<sup>1</sup> From this Marr concludes, the book says, that Jews are the most fearful opponent of the Teutonic race, which must make a last-minute stand against "the Jewification of society."

The Nazis adopted these views in their first program, in 1920, in which they proclaimed that only people "of German blood, irrespective of their religion" could belong to the German community, and that therefore "no Jew can be a member of the German community." In his programmatic book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), Hitler expanded on the theme.

After being handed power, the Nazis started incorpo-

rating the racial "theories" of anti-Semitism into their laws. From April to December, 1933, they issued 36 decrees limiting the rights of the half-million Jews living in Germany and depriving them of their jobs, starting with public-service jobs. This campaign was accompanied by intensive propaganda insinuating that the Jews were responsible for all the problems that beset the nation.

Early in the Hitler regime, signs started appearing in shopwindows with the inscription "Jews not welcome," and this exclusion was gradually extended to all public facilities, from park benches to public schools. The full-scale drive to rob Jews of their possessions followed this campaign of vilification.

By 1935, the Nazis were ready to pass the infamous "Nuremberg laws" which divided the population into citizens of "German and kindred blood," who were to enjoy full citizenship, and other "inhabitants," who were officially second-class citizens, such as Jews, who enjoyed no citizenship rights at all. This was accompanied by a second law prohibiting marriages and extra-marital sex relations between Jews and "Aryans." Such sex relations were called "racial disgrace" and severely punished.

Despite this zealous hate campaign against the "Jewish race," the only definition of this "race" the Nazis were able to produce was that a person with at least three Jewish grandparents belonging to the "Jewish faith" would be considered racially Jewish.

During the early years of the Hitler regime, the Nazis retained some caution about anti-Semitic excesses, in order to deal with the ruling classes of Britain, France, the United States and other imperialist states who had an ambivalent attitude toward the Jews – anti-Semitic but "genteelly" so. Bertolt Brecht, the great poet-playwright, bitterly characterized this attitude, and in particular that of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, when he wrote: "For them the persecution of Jews is particularly vexing because it seems a wholly 'super-



fluous' aberration. . . One cannot assume that the Chamberlains see pogroms as actual manifestations of the basic bestiality of fascism, which they must hide from their people in order to sit with the beast at the negotiating table, which is always the dining table.

"They feel that pogroms are not vitally essential for capitalism and therefore should not be committed. They have not grasped the method of fascism of converting class struggles into race struggles. They are still in a position to have parliaments because they still have the majority in the parliaments."<sup>2</sup>

The Nazis' slight restraint ended when the French and the British governments, with the approval of the United States, signed the Munich Accord in September 1938. By this act the representatives of imperialism surrendered to Hitler's and Mussolini's expansionist demands, endorsed the Nazi occupation and dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and, in exchange for "peace in our time," made evident their acquiescence in Hitler's eastern policy. Thus the accord opened the door for large-scale territorial conquests, the drive for *Lebensraum* (living space) for Hitler's "thousand-year Reich."

To prepare for aggressive, large-scale war, the Nazis decided on a nation-wide pogrom against the Jewish population. The pretext for it was the assassination of a staff member of the German Embassy in Paris, Counselor Ernst von Rath, by the 17-year old Hershel Grynszpan, a Jew, acting in despair to avenge the deportation of his family to Poland.

During the night of November 9, 1938, synagogues throughout Germany went up in flames. Thousands of Jews were driven into the streets, spat upon, beaten and humiliated. Many were clubbed to death, shot "while trying to escape" or driven to suicide. During that night and the following day, 30,000 Jews were arrested and carted off to prisons and concentration camps. Buchenwald alone received 12,000 of them. According to Hit-

ler's Chief of Security Police, Reinhard Heydrich, 267 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish business establishments were destroyed.<sup>3</sup> Property damage went into the hundreds of million marks. There was large-scale looting of Jewish property.

In an attempt to minimize foreign reaction to this carnage and to reinforce the class image of Jewish wealth, the Nazis called this pogrom "Crystal Night," to create the implication that all that had been destroyed was cut glass and chandeliers, items associated with affluence.

The "aryanization" of Jewish businesses had been started earlier by pressuring Jewish banks, insurance companies, industrial enterprises and small family businesses and shops to sell out at bargain prices. The greatest beneficiaries were Hitler's big-business backers, such as the Siemens and Flick concerns, and the Deutsche Bank and Discontogesellschaft. They managed to appropriate the most important Jewish businesses, though they had to share the spoils with the top Nazi leaders.

These transactions had at least a semblance of legality since sales were made, though under duress and at a fraction of the actual property value. All bars were down after the "Crystal Night" and Jews were robbed of all their remaining property. The state decreed that they were responsible for the destruction wreaked by the pogrom and that therefore they should pay damages. This was achieved by taxing all Jewish property 25 percent of its value, payable in four quarterly installments.

At Buchenwald, Jews were released only after signing over their property, including houses, cars and even motorbikes. There were 39,532 Jewish business establishments still in existence on April 1, 1938. A year later 14,803 had been liquidated and 5,976 "aryanized." The remaining 18,753 were in the process of being disowned. When payments were made, they were put into frozen accounts and then gradually confiscated by the state as special taxes and "contributions." While some small Nazi



functionaries profited from the plunder, the real winners were the Nazi leaders and their capitalist backers.

The political significance of the "Crystal Night" was explained by Hitler himself in a speech to the German press on November 10.

"For decades circumstances have forced me to talk about peace," as the prize for arming the country and carrying through the first annexationist ventures, he explained. The flaw in this policy, he continued, was that it created the illusion among the people that his regime was determined to preserve peace at all costs. It was therefore now necessary "to change the psychological condition of the German people and to show that some things cannot be achieved by peaceful means but must be won by force." To achieve that, he said, events had to be directed in such a way "that the inner voice of the people would begin to demand the use of force. That means that certain events must be shown in such a light that the conviction grows in the minds of the masses of people that what cannot be achieved peacefully must be attained by force..."<sup>4</sup>

This was public acknowledgment of preparations for World War II in which 50 million people would be killed, 35 million maimed and 20 million orphaned. Among those killed were six million Jews. Among the non-combatant victims from 1933 to 1945 were 18 million inmates of concentration and extermination camps, of whom only seven million survived.<sup>5</sup> This does not include those opponents of the Hitler regime held in prisons and tortured to death or executed there.

Anti-Semitism was only one application of the "Aryan super-race" theory.

## Gypsies, Sorbs and other victims

In Germany proper, two other groups were affected by racist policies – the Gypsies and the Sorbs. A separate chapter (Chapter 14) is devoted to the Sorbs, a national minority living in a specific section of the country. The Gypsies, on the other hand, like the Jews, were scattered throughout the land. Most of the Gypsies were nomads. My information on their fate is derived from a book by Heinz Mode and Siegfried Woelffling, *Gypsies – the Fate of a People in Germany*.<sup>6</sup>

They write that Gypsies – who originated in India – were first mentioned as living in Germany in the early 15th century. Like the Jews, they suffered discrimination throughout the centuries. While I could find no population figures on Gypsies, they were described as the "second most significant foreign racial group in Germany," by R. Kramer, an apologist for fascist race theories, who advocated that the Nuremberg race laws be applied to them.<sup>7</sup>

Mode and Woelffling point out a bitter irony of racism. "These people had to suffer the same fate as the Jews," they write, "even though research on their language shows that they were 'Aryan' people. At least, if one equates language and nationality, as the National Socialist race theoreticians did, the Gypsies belong to the so-called Indo-Germanic family. That notwithstanding, they were persecuted and hunted in the most cruel manner by adherents of the race theory."<sup>8</sup>

One of the Nazi schemes was to sterilize Gypsies, under various pretexts. Then, in the three waves – 1939, 1941 and 1943 – the Nazis rounded up and sent to concentration and extermination camps all the Gypsies who lived in Germany and in the countries it occupied.

Only a fraction of the Gypsies survived, and the few who live in the GDR today are assimilated. No figures for their number are available, because people are in no



way classified on the basis of racial or religious backgrounds, and the Gypsies have no organization. The compensatory actions initiated in the Soviet Zone for victims of the Nazi regime, described in the following pages, apply to Gypsies as well as to others who suffered at the Nazis' hands.

There is also no overall breakdown of the nationality of the people who perished in concentration camps. A widely quoted figure is 11 million, but the Nazis were very thorough in destroying concentration-camp records, so no breakdown of the exact number and the national distribution exists. It is certain that, in addition to Germans, Jews, Gypsies and Sorbs, there were Austrians, Belgians, Bulgarians, Czechoslovaks, Danes, French, Greeks, Dutch, Hungarians, Italians, Luxembourgers, Norwegians, Poles, Romanians, Spanish, Soviets and Yugoslavs.

A breakdown does exist of the forced laborers who were brought to Germany from all over Europe, a development reminiscent of the shipment of African slaves to the United States and the Western Hemisphere in the 16th to 19th centuries.

An estimated 14 million foreign workers and prisoners of war were brought to Germany for this purpose, and approximately half of them perished. Toward the end of the war these foreign workers constituted nearly one-third – 29.6 percent in January 1944 – of the industrial workforce. About 40 percent came from the Soviet Union, 25 percent from France, 15 percent from Poland. They were driven mercilessly, forced to work without pay, held to starvation rations. About one-third were civilian workers and the rest were prisoners of war and inmates of concentration camps. Among the latter were many German inmates.

Records exist about forced-labor practices at the Buchenwald concentration camp. An invoice made out to the Mitteldeutsche Papierwerke, in July 1942, bills that

plant for 360 skilled and unskilled workers, at rates ranging from 5 to 2 marks a day. The total of 1,430 marks was to be paid to the SS Economic Administration in Oranienburg. The workers had to work a 12-hour day. While they still received 350 grams of bread (about 11 ounces), in 1943 and 1944 this ration was cut down to 250 grams in 1945; and Soviet war prisoners frequently received as little as 100 grams a day.

Another indication of the superprofits derived from the use of labor from concentration camp is reflected in the profits of I. G. Farben which employed many. Their profits in 1932 were 48 million marks; in 1937, when arms production had moved into high gear, the figure was 231 million marks, and in 1943 it rose to 822 million marks.

For plants owned by the SS, Gestapo Chief Heinrich Himmler set a special daily rate for lease of a worker, ranging from 1.50 marks to 30 pfennigs. Altogether, the SS earned nearly 70 million marks in 1944 through hiring out the inmates of Buchenwald alone. It was a most brutal exploitation, since it lacked even the slaveowners' interest in keeping the workers alive. This was the practice of the "master race" theory.

The anti-fascist resistance played a heroic role in the struggle against these outrages. While suffering the most stringent persecution themselves, Communists, Social Democrats, Christians and other anti-fascists displayed great heroism in protecting the lives of victims in various ways. They were not able to stay the hands of the butchers but after liberation those who were alive were ready to help eradicate fascist ideology.

Such was the background for the struggle to eradicate fascist ideology after liberation.



"Filled with a sense of burning shame..."

As soon as the formation of democratic parties and trade unions was permitted in the Soviet Zone, on June 11, 1945, the Communist Party's ten-point program included measures for cleansing the country from the fascist ideological morass.

It placed responsibility for the crimes not only on the "unconscionable adventurers and criminals responsible for the war" but also on all those who supported, profited from, acquiesced in and remained silent in the face of the "monstrous crimes" committed. "Every German must be filled with a sense of burning shame in the knowledge that the German people share heavily in the responsibility and guilt. . ." it said.

The appeal called for "equality before the law of all citizens, irrespective of race, and the most severe punishment of all manifestations of race hatred; cleansing the entire educational establishment of fascist and reactionary filth; cultivation of a truly democratic, progressive and free spirit in all schools and institutions of learning; systematic education about the barbaric character of race theories and about the fraud of the 'quest for living space,' about the catastrophic consequences of Hitler's policy for the German people. . ."

Translating this program into reality was a long, difficult and heartbreaking job. All schoolbooks were examined, and those propagating fascist and racist ideas were discarded. Steps taken to proceed with denazification have been described previously. Many anti-fascist "activists of the first hour" agree that in those first years the most difficult and harrowing confrontation was not with the hunger and devastation of the cities and the economy but with the moral depravity of the people.

Kurt Goldstein, a Jewish Communist and head of the Committee of former Inmates of Auschwitz Concentration Camp in the GDR, said that the insistence on con-

fronting the past was a major reason why some people left the Soviet Occupation Zone and went to live in the West. This view, while it cannot be documented, is born out by many stories and supported by many anti-fascist veterans.

Hans Seigewasser, GDR State Secretary for Church Affairs, said that, next to cleansing the state apparatus of Nazis and war criminals, the educational effort was most important. "Right from the beginning, we not only prosecuted manifestations of anti-Semitism, racism and chauvinism in accordance with the law, but we undertook a widespread educational campaign to re-introduce the humanist, progressive and anti-fascist heritage."

This found expression in the type of books published, the newspapers and radio programs and all other cultural endeavors. When the first theater reopened four months after the war's end, it was the Deutsche Theater in Berlin, with a production of *Nathan der Weise* by the 18th-century humanist German author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). The play's protagonist is a Jew who sets an example of humanitarianism and tolerance.

Secretary Seigewasser said that, over the years, anti-Semitic or racist violations have become very rare. He considers linking the advocacy of racism and warmongering very important because of their historic interaction. He says, "There is no organized anti-Semitism in our country, but there may be people, especially among the older ones, who still hold and express anti-Semitic ideas. This we try to counter with educational work in the schools, as well as through public organizations, especially in the National Front."

He recalls an incident that took place a few years ago. Six children were caught breaking some back windows in a Berlin synagogue by throwing stones from the roof of a nearby garage.

"The police were called in and got in touch with the local council of the National Front and the school. The



families of all the children were visited, and discussions showed that there was no basis for anti-Semitism. It turned out that the children had climbed on top of the garage from where the only 'target' was those windows. It was clear that the children had committed an anti-social act for which they had to be called to account. It also showed that there were not enough playgrounds and recreational facilities in the neighborhood."

I questioned many people on this point and was assured that there is seldom any expression of anti-Semitism. One story of an "anti-Semitic incident" that I heard was the following: An officer, who found his recruits sloppy, used the word *Judenwirtschaft* an old epithet which has no equivalent in our language but implies that Jews are disorderly, dirty and undisciplined. One of the recruits protested. The officer was disciplined.

Many talks with children and young people convinced me that they did not know who is Jewish and who isn't.

It is also significant that there are quite a few Jews in important positions in the GDR, but this is never discussed or pointed out. It is left to the individual to announce his or her Jewish background if they wish, as did artist Lea Grundig, who was a member of the SED's Central Committee, or author Peter Edel. There is no way of telling how many Jews live in the GDR. The only count is membership in the Jewish congregations which is 700 and certainly accounts for only a fraction of the persons of Jewish origin in the country. Of course, there is also a lot of intermarriage.

On the other hand, the GDR Constitution guarantees religious rights. In Article 39, section 1, it states: "Every citizen of the GDR has the right to profess a religious creed and to carry out religious activities." And this is translated into practice.

"We would be quite unable to function as a congregation without the state's financial aid," says Dr. Peter Kirchner, chairman of the Berlin Jewish congregation. A

man in his early forties, he is a medical doctor by profession and the elected volunteer head of Berlin's 340 religiously organized Jews.

The state supplies the congregation's annual budget, which covers all expenses, including those for maintenance of the Jewish old-age home, a kosher butcher shop, importing matzos and kosher wine, travel to international conferences and meetings and, of course, wages and salaries as needed for rabbi services and office help.

An even larger sum is allocated for the maintenance of 130 Jewish cemeteries and the synagogues. In Dresden and Erfurt, new synagogues were built with state funds.

In 1978, a Jewish library was reestablished in Berlin; the old one had been destroyed during the war. It is open to the public, employs a part-time librarian and offers books on Judaism, by Jewish authors and on Jewish themes. It is also state-financed.

The effort to acquaint the population with the great traditions of Jewish culture is a continuing feature. Jewish literary works, ecclesiastical and folk music are made available regularly. There are films and plays depicting the persecution of Jews by the Nazi regime. One of the longest runs in Berlin's renowned "Komische Oper" was *Fiddler on the Roof*. The Jewish congregation has a weekly half-hour radio program on Saturdays; it varies, but contains a great amount of Jewish ecclesiastical music.

When the television series "Holocaust" was shown in the Federal Republic of Germany in the winter of 1979, FRG radio and TV crews got busy with "man in the street" interviews in the GDR about the effect of this show on those who had seen it. These reporters, usually so adept at ferreting out flaws in GDR life, received a unanimous response, the crux of which was: "We know all about this, we have learned it in school. We have visited concentration camps and been informed. We have read books, seen films, and we also know *why* this happened, which 'Holocaust' did not show."



This widespread understanding of the cause and purpose of anti-Semitism and racism is a great feat of popular education. It went hand in hand with affirmative action toward the immediate victims of the Nazi regime among the German population, including the Jews.

In the FRG, struggle against fascist and racist ideology has always been half-hearted. In recent years there has been a great upsurge in neo-Nazi activities, the publication of many pro-Nazi books such as the memoirs of prominent Nazis or their widows, terrorist attacks on progressive organizations and on Jews, all encouraged by the acquittal of war criminals in recent trials.

## 13 Survivors of the Holocaust

Right after the defeat of the Hitler regime, committees were set up by former inmates of concentration camps and prisons to help the victims of the fascist regime. The committees consisted of men and women of various political persuasions who had stood together in the camps and helped one another survive. Their first concern was to obtain clothing, food and living quarters for them in the devastated country and to assist in reuniting families. By June 1945, they had established an overall committee of "Victims of Fascism" with headquarters in Berlin. They published pamphlets to acquaint the population with the truth about the concentration camps. They established health rehabilitation centers and organized medical care for their members.

They also set up commissions to check the claims of persons who regarded themselves to be victims of the Nazi regime, and to eliminate any criminal elements, especially former Nazis, who sought to provide themselves with a "respectable" identity.

By 1947, in the four occupation zones, 250,000 persons had been certified as victims of the Nazi regime. They received special identification cards entitling them to certain privileges. The cards of those who had been active in the resistance movement were stamped "Resistance Fighter."

But all too soon, their treatment in the separate occupation zones began to differ. While they were treated with special concern in the Soviet Zone, cold-war policies in the West soon laid the basis for political discrimination.



In the Soviet Zone, resistance fighters were viewed as pioneers in the liberation from the Nazi yoke and as political allies in rebuilding the nation. Affirmative action for them was built into the denazification drive. They provided reliable cadres for a democratic rebirth of the country, for administration and industry. They were offered every chance to qualify for jobs and for new professions.

Because of what they had endured, they were given many socio-economic advantages. Their pension age was fixed five years lower than the prevailing 60 years for women and 65 for men. In addition to their social security pension, they also receive an "honor pension" that gives them a total retirement income about 30 percent above the average wage. This honor pension is 20 percent higher for resistance fighters than for those classified as victims. The only other way in which a differentiation in benefits is made between the victims and resistance fighters is that the latter were given a medal "Fighter against Fascism 1933-1945" which carries an annual annuity of 500 marks.

All other benefits are the same for all victims whether they participated actively in the resistance or not. They all receive preferential health treatment which includes the right to hospital accommodations in a single or a two-bed room; they receive three additional paid vacation days a year and special allotments of preventive stays in health resorts.

There are also numerous advantages for their families. Their children receive a special stipend from the time they are 16 years old until they complete their education. When they get married, they receive preferential apartment allotments so that their parents do not have to live in crowded conditions.

In 1974, their pensions were raised, and in addition public surface transportation throughout the country was made available to them and an accompanying person

free of charge. The reason for this was that the living standard of the entire population had increased and it was felt important that the victims of the Nazi regime should receive additional benefits to indicate the continued gratitude and respect of the nation.

Special provisions for victims of the Nazi regime are also codified in the Labor Code of 1977. Paragraph 58 regulates their additional vacations while paragraph 194 decrees that their work contracts, like those of pregnant women, mothers of small children, those on sick leave or those in military service, cannot be terminated by the employer.

There are also special benefits to victims who are invalids and to widows, too many for all to be enumerated here. It is quite clear that these people all enjoy a better than average living standard and have respected and prestigious positions in society.

The situation of victims of the Nazi regime in the FRG is quite different. Because the Western occupation forces developed a policy of "containment of Communism," the resistance fighters and victims of fascism became an embarrassment.

The newsweekly *Der Spiegel* – not a publication suspect of pro-Communist views – published two articles on the fate of these people in March 1979 (Nos. 12-13). They report that those persecuted by the Nazi regime, despite political and religious differences, "are almost universally united by a great bitterness, because they were denied the well-earned appreciation of society." It quotes a West Berlin sociology professor, Theo Pirker, that postwar hopes that "victims of the Nazi regime and resistance fighters would become a representative force in the economic and cultural reconstruction have not been fulfilled."

The articles point out that victims of the Nazi regime are subjected to incredible bureaucratic chicanery in terms of their material well-being. *Der Spiegel* quotes



Attorney Uri Siegel of the Bavarian State Federation of Jewish Congregations as saying that restitution "is conducted with German thoroughness" and therefore often leads to injustices.

The most blatant injustices are reserved for Communist victims of the Hitler regime. As a cold-war measure the government of Dr. Konrad Adenauer not only outlawed the Communist Party in 1956, but also passed legislation denying Communists the right to restitution. Though the courts have since rescinded some of the punitive measures, discrimination persists. *Der Spiegel* reports that Heinz Schroeder, "imprisoned by the Nazis for his illegal work for the Social Democratic Party of Germany, and since 1946 a member of the Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin - which was never banned - did not receive a penny with the exception of a one-time compensation of 5 marks for each day of his imprisonment. His application for restitution was rejected as 'unfounded' " because of his political views. The 5 marks a day he and many of his fellow victims received as the sole compensation from the FRG government is a true bit of historic irony. It constitutes the exact amount the Nazis charged industrial enterprises for the "lease" of a skilled worker inmate of a concentration camp.

Ruth Warneck, chairperson of the West Berlin Committee of Persecuted Social Democrats, charges that this treatment is a grave injustice, "especially since strongly incriminated Nazis receive their pensions." Ms. Warneck, who is considering legal action against the "hair-raising injustice" of the restitution authorities, says "they cheat us wherever they can."

Since the early 1970s the special discrimination against Communist victims of the Hitler regime has been fueled anew by the anti-radical decree which permits state governments to bar progressives from public service jobs. A prime example is that of the Gingold family. Sylvia Gingold, a teacher, was among the first victims of this

decree, called the *Berufsverbot*. She was fired from her teaching job because of her membership in the German Communist Party (DKP). Her grandparents had been persecuted as Jews, and her father, Peter Gingold, after being forced to flee Nazi Germany, had joined the French resistance and was awarded high honors for his bravery by the French government.

Even beyond the special discrimination against Communist resistance fighters, bureaucracy and favoritism in the treatment of the victims is so bad that many West German victims, even those who are anti-Communist, view the GDR system with envy. Thus *Der Spiegel* quotes Social Democrat Hans Linsert as saying that he views GDR benefits as "exemplary" and "this is what is lacking in the FRG."

## Reparations and restitution

Frequently the GDR is challenged by the West for allegedly shirking its responsibility in relation to reparations. There is a deliberate attempt to obscure the fact that the Potsdam decisions assigned to the Soviet Zone the responsibility for reparations to the Soviet Union, which in turn was to satisfy Polish claims from these receipts. All other claims for restitution were assigned to the three Western zones, and that included Jewish claims.

On this basis, the FRG pays pensions to a quarter of a million recipients as victims of the Nazi regime, of whom two-thirds live abroad. But the distribution of these pensions was by no means even-handed. For example, 400,000 Hungarian Jews, sent to Auschwitz extermination camp in April 1944, were told by FRG authorities that they arrived there "two weeks too late." Their ordeal was two weeks short of the year's incarceration that had been set up as the qualification for the pensions.



FRG payments to Israel have an interesting background and no basis in international agreements. In the early 1950s the West German government of Dr. Konrad Adenauer was faced with considerable resistance to FRG membership in the European Community and in NATO, the memory of the war still being fresh. To improve his country's image, the Adenauer government concluded a treaty with Israel in September 1952, known as the Treaty of Luxembourg. In it, the FRG undertook to pay Israel so-called reparations for Nazi crimes.

Hans Lebrecht, an internationally known Israeli journalist and himself a victim of the Nazi regime, describes the situation like this:

"This so-called restitution is typical for its [the FRG's] neo-colonialist aims. The FRG paid 3.5 billion German marks for direct 'restitution,' however, not in cash but in industrial goods. The following example shows the neo-colonialist nature of this aid: More than a third came in the form of 57 modern cargo vessels, which became the basis for Israel's relatively large merchant fleet... In the 1950s the young national states of Asia and Africa, newly liberated from colonial yokes, had difficulty with their import-export trade because transport was entirely in the hands of the former colonial masters. Suddenly there appeared the merchant marine of the newly formed state of Israel, which rushed into the breach. In reality, it became a proxy for the interests of neo-colonialism.

"The other part of the restitution came chiefly in railroad stock and industrial equipment, such as steel and pipe plants which soon had to be scrapped because they were obsolete. What was the goal? FRG monopolies quickly came to the aid and modernized those railroads and industrial enterprises, and became part owners.

"In accordance with a supplementary agreement, Israel received a further 3.5 billion DM in cash to be used for the care and pensions of invalids of Nazi persecution who

were not members of the German ethnic community. The Israeli government embezzled these funds and used them for its own purposes, and it was only after long struggles that the invalids received a starvation pension, which represents only a fraction of what they would have been entitled to from the FRG without the Luxembourg agreement."



## 14 Sorbs – a National Minority

In Bautzen, population 48,000, there is a modern 461-seat theater with simultaneous-translation equipment. This is the home of the German-Sorb People's Theater, a permanent, state-subsidized ensemble of 30 people that offers 16 different productions a year, half of them in the Sorb language. Two are for children, one each in the Sorb and German languages, and the simultaneous-translation equipment serves to make the theater truly bilingual.

This theater with its spectacular bilingual approach was the most persuasive evidence to me that the Sorb minority has achieved equality in the GDR. There is much other evidence of this, such as bilingual street signs in the towns and villages of 12 counties near the GDR's eastern border, where 100,000 Sorbs live scattered among Germans.

The history of their persecution dates back 1,000 years to when the Slavic tribes living along the Elbe River fell victim to the advance of the German feudal lords. Today the share of the Sorbs in the GDR population is roughly equivalent of that of the Native American Indians in the United States.

Throughout the 1,000 years of repression, the Sorbs resisted all efforts by successive rulers to wipe them out or force them to assimilate. Even Martin Luther, a pioneer in the worship in the peoples' own tongue, predicted extinction of the Sorb language.

The people's resistance to repression resulted in numerous revolts and uprisings of peasants and craftsmen, and in a tenacious defense of their language. Their



survival as an ethnic group was probably also aided by the fact that they lived in a swampy district, in which transportation was largely by boat on narrow waterways, and which was difficult to penetrate.

Since the Sorbs survived despite all attacks through the centuries, the Nazis determined to "solve" the problems once and for all. In 1937, they banned all Sorb organizations and publications. "We used to be beaten in school for speaking Sorb," Benno Schulze, an official of the House of Sorb Folk Culture in Bautzen told me.

In May 1940, Reichs Commissioner Heinrich Himmler issued a memorandum on the treatment of foreign minorities in the East. This was after the Nazis had taken over Czechoslovakia and Poland, but before the attack on the Soviet Union, though it outlined a policy projected for occupied Soviet territory.

Himmler expounded the idea that as many different nationalities as possible must be recognized, because "we have the greatest interest in viewing the population of the East not as an entity but on the contrary to subdivide it into as many parts and splinters as possible . . ." This would enable them to conduct a radical sifting to separate the "racially valuable" and bring them to Germany for assimilation.

For the others, including the Sorbs, he said that "there is to be no more than four years of schooling for the non-German population in the East. This type of school is to convey basic arithmetic with numbers up to 500, writing one's own name, and inculcating in the pupils the understanding that it is a divine duty to carry out the orders of the Germans and to be honest, diligent and good. I do not consider reading necessary."

This plan was to be carried through in the course of ten years, during which parts of the population of Germany with the same "racial and human earmarks" - such as the Sorbs - would be transferred to the Eastern provinces. There they would be available as "a leader-

less labor reserve and would provide Germany annually with itinerant workers and workers for special projects (road construction, quarries and building projects)."<sup>1</sup>

Further details of the Nazi plan for "resettlement" of the Sorbs were revealed during the hearings of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. Part of the plan was to "aryanize" Sorb children by taking them away from their parents and exterminating the adults.

The execution of this plan was prevented by the advance of the Red Army under the command of Marshal I. S. Konev, who ordered his troops to treat the Sorbs as a friendly population. This was the first step in the process of their liberation.

Communists had long been advocates of equal rights for the Sorbs. In 1926 and 1927 they sought to get an equal-rights law passed in the Saxony legislature but were defeated. Such legislation was not realized in the area until May 1948, a year and a half before the GDR was founded. That year the Domowina (Homeland), a Sorb national democratic organization, submitted a bill in the Saxony legislature with the aid of the SED caucus, and it was passed.

### Exercise of rights, encouraged by the state

Subsequently, the first GDR Constitution of October 7, 1949, had the following provision in Article 11: "Foreign language minorities of the republic are to be encouraged in their free ethnic development through legislation and administration; in particular, they should not be restrained in the use of their mother tongue in education, in government and in the administration of justice."

Accordingly, bilingual education was established throughout the district, and all administrative offices



were put on a bilingual basis. On request, legal proceedings are held in the Sorb language. By 1968, when the first socialist Constitution was adopted, equality had progressed sufficiently to change the section dealing with Sorb rights to read, in Article 40: "Citizens of the German Democratic Republic of Sorb nationality have the right to cultivate their mother tongue and culture. The exercise of this right is encouraged by the state."

Regarding the achievement of political equality, Sieghard Kosel, a member of the executive council of the Domowina and editor in chief of the Sorbian daily *Nowa Doba*, has the following story. The Domowina was formed in 1912 as a federation of 31 local Sorb organizations, to "ward off the increasing oppression of the Sorbs." But, under the conditions of those days, the prospects for improvement in the economic and social spheres were poor.

Dissolved by the Nazis in 1937, the Domowina was reconstituted on May 10, 1945, two days after the unconditional surrender. It became part of the National Front, and today about 2,000 Sorbs are active participants in National Front Committees.

In addition, more than 2,000 Sorbs are elected office holders, five in the People's Chamber and the others in district, county and local assemblies. About 100 Sorbs are mayors and preside over the municipal affairs in the area, though Sorbs are a majority in only a very few villages.

Economic equality for the Sorbs was achieved through the basic changes in society. For them the land reform played a particularly important role, because many of them had been farmworkers or small peasants. Others profited from the nationalization of industry, where they had held the hardest and worst-paid jobs for many years. Now they had every opportunity to qualify for every type of work. Those who were subjected to special persecution now receive benefits as victims of the Nazi

regime, as previously described. But their most spectacular accomplishment as a national minority is in the cultural sphere. A Sorbian Department in the Ministry of Education supervises a meticulous program of special education. There are six 10-year and two 12-year schools in which Sorb is the main language. In another 53 schools, Sorb is taught as a foreign language from the first grade. In addition there are Sorb pre-school child-care facilities. All these institutions are attended on parents' demand. I was told that it is not unusual for German parents to send their children to Sorb pre-school facilities, and many German children attend schools in which Sorb is taught as the second language. "Many people like their children to grow up bilingually," Schulze says, "and there are, of course, many mixed families where both languages are often spoken in the home."

Teachers for these schools are trained at the Karl Jan-nack Teachers' College, which has 400 students. It is named for a Sorb teacher, who was one of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany. There is also an Institute for Sorbian Studies at Karl Marx University in Leipzig.

Instead of diminishing, interest in the Sorb language and culture has increased. In addition to *Nowa Doba*, the Domowina publishing house issues nine periodicals, schoolbooks and a broad range of literary works. The latter features, in addition to Sorb authors, translations from German and world literature.

Among the periodicals are a monthly specializing in art and literature, two children's magazines in the language's two dialects, as well as two religious publications – one for Catholics and one for Protestant Sorbs. Among the books – 70 to 80 titles annually – are textbooks, fiction, scientific and general volumes.

The best-known Sorb writer is Jurij Brězan, who writes in the Sorb and German languages and whose



books have been translated into 18 other languages. He is widely regarded as the father of modern Sorb prose and he says that, because of long repression, it was necessary to develop prose "in such a manner that all spheres of life were accessible to it and, conversely, that it could influence all spheres of life. The language underwent a formative process in the widest sense of the word, corresponding to the social and national status of today's free Sorb life on a basis of equality."

In addition to literature and language, there is a great interest in Sorb folk art, which is kept alive by many art and craft workshops, as well as by dance and song ensembles which are in great demand throughout the GDR and beyond its borders.

A friend who often visits the Sorb region told me that he is convinced that there is not a vestige of prejudice left.

I pointed to the fact that the Western press makes much of the fact that one sometimes hears derogatory remarks against Poles and, less often, against Czechoslovaks. "It is true," he said, "there has been a slight increase since we opened the borders in 1971, and there was suddenly a great influx of Poles and Czechoslovaks here, as well as of our people in those countries." It is a short drive between the major cities of these countries, and border traffic can be compared with that between San Diego and Tijuana, or Hamilton and Detroit.

"Since there are certain differences in the availability and prices of consumer goods, excessive crowding in downtown stores and large-scale buying of certain items caused some friction. Words like 'Polack', which had disappeared, made a comeback among some people.

"We did several things. We conducted an educational campaign against this sort of thing. We adjusted prices and limited the export of certain goods. After all, it was insupportable for Czechoslovakia to have the GDR citizens who live near the border drive over to fill their

tanks. The Czechoslovak government raised gasoline prices to the level of ours, and eliminated a car owners' tax so that their citizens didn't lose. Our government, on the other hand, limited the number of shoes that can be taken across the border, because our shoes are cheaper. We also intensified the contacts between plants, towns, social and political organizations to strengthen the bonds. Despite the occasional lapses which occurred, the free traffic between our countries has proven to be a big advantage. None of our citizens would want to miss it, and the real understanding that has grown among the populations is much weightier than the lapses that have occurred."

We have seen how racist and anti-Semitic views were overcome in the GDR. But the most important effort and continuing antidote to racism proved to be the practice of international solidarity.



## 15 International Solidarity — Antidote to Racism

"The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people of all nations and tongues and kindreds," Abraham Lincoln told a workers' delegation to the White House in 1864.<sup>1</sup>

I became aware of how strongly this is practiced in the GDR as soon as I arrived in 1974. At Berlin's Centrum department store, among announcements concerning new merchandise and lost children, I heard "Pablo Neruda memorial coins can be purchased on the first and third floors from the cashiers in the book and hardware departments. Solidarity postcards are also available." The memorial coins turned out to be handsome silver pieces costing 12 to 36 marks depending on size. Postcards and lapel buttons expressing solidarity were available.

I also found large glass solidarity-collection boxes in stores which, in addition to coins, held bills of various denominations. At almost all public events "solidarity booths" did a land-office business selling a variety of items that would have done honor to any benefit bazaar.

This practice stems from the recognition that neither laws nor affirmative action by government, though indispensable, are sufficient to extirpate chauvinist and racist attitudes and instill a population with the understanding that "an injury to one is an injury to all."

The effort to promote international solidarity started right after liberation. Kurt Goldstein was assigned to the youth movement in Thuringia at that time. He told me about the great effort it required for former inmates



of concentration camps to overcome their hatred and suspicion of those Germans who had actively participated in or at least acquiesced to the fascist crimes.

### Their brothers' keepers

"We paid great attention to introducing activities with humanitarian content," he said. "Even at the time of the 'Crystal Night,' the Communist Party had called on the population to act in accordance with the teachings of the German humanist Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), who urged 'Equality of all those with a human face.'"

"Our first campaign for solidarity was to call on our urban population in the fall of 1945 to contribute apples for Berlin's children. It was a desperately hungry winter, and spare food could easily be swapped for other essentials. People were in need of every necessity of life. Our Free German Youth members went from house to house and argued, when the door wasn't slammed in their face. The apples we collected were brought to Berlin in trucks.

"After that we organized a drive to help old people get firewood for the winter. Very gradually, hostility gave way to the understanding that these activities were for the benefit of all. By 1957 we were able to move to a much broader level, with actions for international solidarity."

By then Goldstein had become director of the GDR's nationally owned radio station. "We appealed to the population to support the persecuted patriots in the Federal Republic of Germany, where the government had followed the lead of the Joe McCarthy-type persecution of Communists and progressives. We also appealed to our listeners for funds to help the victims of that persecution. In exchange for contributions, we would play a musical piece of the donor's choice. This

campaign became an institution, and now we do it every year. In 1978, it netted 9 million marks. Of course this campaign has educational and financial aspects. We must convince people and by convincing them we get them to act, not just to contribute money but to take political action.

"This is what made it possible for us, in our small country, to get millions of messages and postcards demanding the freedom of Angela Davis."

In 1960, the movement for international solidarity had become so firmly entrenched that an overall organization to facilitate these activities was needed. The GDR Solidarity Committee was founded, consisting of representatives of public and political organizations and of special sections which include the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, African Solidarity, the Chile Center and so on. Committee members represent all walks of life - production workers, journalists, artists, trade-union officials and religious figures.

The Solidarity Committee president, Kurt Seibt, reported early in 1979 that funds exceeding 200 million marks had been contributed by the population in 1978. The bulk, 160 million marks, came from the Free German Trade Unions.

All union members are asked to make monthly contributions - this is voluntary but the great majority of members contribute - which are collected with the union dues. Horst Kuligowski, a member of the committee and chairman of the "Unidad Popular" brigade at the Wilhelm Pieck Cable Plant in Berlin, reported that solidarity contributions of his group amounted to 56 percent of the union dues. At the Mansfeld copper mine it reached 72 percent. Some people contribute a sum equal to their union dues every month, while others make token payments a subject of many heated discussions. It has also become a tradition in most places that an additional contribution is made whenever a bonus is paid.



Unions are not the only ones involved in regular contributions. In craft cooperatives, 90 percent of the membership make regular monthly payments. Cooperative farmers and agricultural workers contribute about 10 million marks annually. Of that sum, 1.6 million marks come from members of the German Peasant Party, which has a membership of about 100,000.

The other political parties, the Free German Youth, the Democratic Women's Federation and the League for Culture similarly participate in the fund drive.

On a bulletin board in a Leipzig student dormitory I saw a notice calling for participation in a "workday" for African solidarity. Volunteers were assigned to unskilled work on a building site or in a plant and were paid the prevailing wage. Since there is a labor shortage in the country plenty such jobs are available. The money earned is then turned over to the "Soli-fund." These "workdays" are organized by the Free German Youth.

Schoolchildren, members of the Thaelmann Pioneers - named for Ernst Thaelmann, the Communist leader murdered by the Nazis - regularly call on households to collect waste materials that can be recycled. The proceeds from their sale, and from that of handicraft items they sell at community events or open-school nights, have come to about 3 million marks annually in recent years.

In addition, many tenants groups contribute, from funds received from communal housing authorities for their share in maintenance work and from collection of recyclable waste. These are usually people who already contribute elsewhere, but helping others has become a deep-seated need among the vast majority of the people.

This activity goes hand in hand with political expressions of solidarity. There are many issues that are taken up - from the Wilmington Ten, a campaign in which religious circles developed particularly intensive activity, to protest resolutions demanding the freedom of Nelson

Mandela of South Africa, and demanding the release of political prisoners in Chile and elsewhere.

The Solidarity Committee puts out posters to acquaint people with the most urgent issues, but even more significant, contributing to the high level of understanding among the population are the many wallpapers in plant departments, offices, shops and apartment houses. On these papers the burning issues of the day are illustrated with newspaper clippings, home-made petitions, children's drawings and photos.

The practice of solidarity goes further. Many citizens invite foreign students or vocational trainees to their homes. For example, Irmgard Dahlke, librarian at the Berlin plant for television electronics, "adopted" four of 30 Vietnamese apprentices who were taking a three-year training course at the plant. When the young people came, they knew no German and were strangers in a strange land. "Mother" Dahlke invited four of them to her house, shared a meal, visited them at their dormitory, celebrated their birthdays and gave them affection when homesickness struck. "They had a good dorm and everything they needed," Ms. Dahlke said. "But they needed warmth, love and security. Therefore several of the comrades in our plant gave them special attention after working hours, on Sundays and holidays. At first homesickness was like a disease. Hanh particularly needed reassurance. I kept consoling her, even though I did not think that it was doing much good. But one day I received a letter from the director of a museum in Hanoi - Hanh's father. He wrote that the friendship extended to his daughter showed 'what great sympathy the people of the GDR have for the Vietnamese people and that a mother in the GDR, just as the mothers in Vietnam, is always ready to offer children protection.'"

Another example of personally extended friendship happened in the industrial town of Schwedt, built around a large petrochemical plant. A few years ago,



the National Front in Schwedt developed the idea of inviting foreign children from the International Children's Camp at Werbellin Lake to spend a weekend in their town.

An appeal was made to the population for families to host the children. A special train was chartered to bring the children on a Saturday morning. On their arrival the children were assigned to their host families. On Saturday afternoon, the local department store was kept open (it normally closes at noon) so that the families would be able to buy presents or souvenirs for their guests. Sunday, at noon, a solidarity meeting was held.

"We were amazed ourselves at how well it went," an official of the Schwedt National Front told me. "Despite the fact that hosts and guests often did not have a common language, our families found a way to the children's hearts. In some cases, uncertain about the kind of food their guests would prefer, the hosts opened refrigerator and pantry doors and simply pointed out the various goodies.

"When the two days were over, there were genuine farewell tears. The second year we had more hosts than children. It has become a firmly established annual event. Some families even arrange their vacations so they won't miss it."

The crunch on the question of solidarity came when the Allende government was overthrown and the GDR government expressed willingness to accept refugees. Accepting them meant caring and arranging for their welfare. It meant clothing and feeding them, and finding them jobs, which was difficult because they did not speak the language. But the greatest difficulty was housing. Giving them housing meant that GDR families who were waiting for a new apartment would be moved down on the waiting list.

"It was our duty to help these people," a worker at the Mansfeld Combine told me. "We gave them money

and clothes, and they got good modern apartments ahead of our own people. We were generous with them. They came from different political parties. All we expected in return is that they would use the time here to gain experience and remain true to their cause, so that they will be able to go back when the time comes and be as useful as possible. I must say that two of them did not have this goal in mind, and they left. Some left our area to study or were given jobs elsewhere. Three are still in our plant. One works in production and is a member of a very good labor brigade, one works in a workshop and the third in a lab. Each one works according to their wishes and abilities. We are glad to help as long as the people who receive help stand by their class, which is our class."

In 1978, the GDR population of 17 million raised over 200 million marks – a tangible expression of their international solidarity. Of that amount, 80 million marks were spent to help rebuild Vietnam and about 100 million in Africa and the Middle East. Just how this money is spent can be gleaned from a report to the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid on September 13, 1978, by Solidarity Committee Chairman Kurt Seibt, accounting for GDR activities during the International Anti-Apartheid Year.

Urgently needed medical supplies and consumer goods were dispatched in 36 chartered cargo ships and 34 planes to Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Seibt said. "The People's Republic of Angola received vaccines for 350,000 children. Solidarity donations from the GDR financed medical supplies to a rehabilitation center in Luanda to which a team of GDR doctors is assigned. Not only medical supplies, but also milk powder, ready-to-serve meals, tents, blankets and clothing were supplied to the African National Congress of South Africa, to the South-West African Peoples Organization of Namibia, to the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe



and to the Organization of African Unity's Liberation Committee.

A big item is the printing of textbooks for newly liberated countries – in some cases the first such textbooks in the native language. Before his assassination in 1973, Amílcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau praised the textbook shipments as “one of the best weapons we can receive.”

One of the problems with sending material aid, be it through the Solidarity Committee or directly by the state, is the fact that first such items have to be produced. They have to be included in the overall economic plan or a special effort has to be made. Therefore many plants work special “solidarity shifts” – usually on Saturdays – to produce the goods needed for these shipments, especially when an emergency situation arises.

## Help to build a new life

Seibt also pointed out that the GDR Solidarity Committee also supports the South African liberation struggle by printing *Sechaba*, official organ of the African National Congress, *Zimbabwe Review*, organ of the Patriotic Front, and *Lotus*, the periodical of the Afro-Asian Writers Association.

Solidarity funds are also used to train foreign students and pay for their expenses. In 1978, 750 students and technicians from African and Arab states received such training as did 5,000 Vietnamese and 240 Laotians. Sick and wounded liberation fighters are treated in the GDR, and every year children from partner countries are given vacations in summer camps.

Though immediate aid is greatly welcomed, much of the support offered is on a long-range basis to help the development of the countries concerned. Seibt said that “thousands of GDR citizens, specialists in different fields, have been assigned to Africa to train skilled

workers. They provide fraternal assistance in solving complicated problems, in organizing a new way of life.”

In this respect the craft cooperatives are particularly active. They raise funds to equip workshops abroad and then send specialists to instruct the workers. For example, clothing cooperatives were built and equipped in Addis Ababa, on São Tomé and Príncipe and in Guinea-Bissau. Two maternity stations were established on the Cape Verde Islands, and the necessary personnel to operate them were trained.

Aid to developing countries and liberation movements is not confined to the activities of the voluntary solidarity movement. The state is also active. The GDR Constitution, Article 6, section 3, directs that it “support the states and peoples fighting against imperialism and its colonial regimes for national freedom and independence in their struggle for social progress.”

Thus there are many long-range agreements with developing countries to build industrial enterprises. In 1977, 570 contracts were in force. As an example, the GDR built the first plant for prefabricated housing panels in Dao Tu, Vietnam, the largest glassworks in Southeast Asia, in Haiphong, and a rolling mill in Gia Sang.

These plants are either built as a gift or at very favorable terms. This differs sharply from U.S. practices which are predicated on the client countries' dependence. An editorial in *The New York Times* (February, 14, 1979) said, “The United States sells more manufactured goods to the developing countries than to Western Europe, Japan and all the Communist countries combined.” It criticized the Carter administration for cutting the Agency for International Development (AID) funds because the resulting diminished buying power of these countries hurts the U.S. economy. “By raising the living standards of the world's poor,” it said, “the United States helps lift the buying power of our best customers.”

Beyond material support, the GDR stresses its ad-



herence to the injunction of its Constitution in its diplomacy. For example, the GDR does not entertain diplomatic relations with the fascist, racist regimes of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Namibia or Chile. The GDR does have close ties with the liberation organizations in those countries, as well as with the Palestine Liberation Organization. All of them, with financial support, have permanent offices in the GDR. Visits by leaders of these organizations are accorded great attention, and they are received with official honors.

The GDR's entire foreign policy is firmly based on the principle of international solidarity. When he addressed the Committee against Apartheid, Seibt submitted copies of a volume containing selections of official documents against racism and apartheid. It showed that the GDR subscribed to all United Nations conventions and other international treaties which move against racism and colonialism, and for self-determination of people. Among these are many documents the U.S. government has failed to sign.

In the volume's preface, the basic tenet of the GDR is stated this way: "The people of the GDR do not regard support for the struggle against the inhuman phenomenon of racism as a temporary, tactical maneuver, but see the complete eradication of both the theory and practice of this specific form of imperialist exploitation and oppression as an important condition for the unfettered implementation of the peoples' right to self-determination, freedom, and independence from all imperialist exploitation and oppression."<sup>2</sup>

This attitude held by the state and by public organizations, which permeates the country's life, is the exact antithesis of the fascists' racist teachings which seized upon any pretext to divide people and alienate them so that they would not recognize and fight against their common enemy.

In the GDR, the "bond of sympathy" uniting "all working people of all nations," as Lincoln said, is truly realized.

## 16 Party of the Ruling Class

One of my Berlin neighbors was a man in his late thirties, a highly skilled construction worker. While acknowledging achievements of socialism, he also always related the current grumbles. An avid viewer of Western television, he often echoed its propaganda and voiced strong criticism of anything he considered a deficiency of socialism, though he admitted he would not want to live "over there."

When his daughter got married and the problem of getting an apartment for the young couple arose, he told me that he had once been on the housing committee of his union, charged with the distribution of apartments allocated to the plant. All apartments are allocated by housing committees, either in enterprises or communities, according to a strict plan of priorities. "It was the most thankless job I ever had," he said. "No matter what you did, people were dissatisfied. After all, we volunteered our time trying to work out priorities and be fair. But whatever we did, all we got was complaints. I quit that job. Let the comrades do it."

It was a backhanded compliment for the members of the SED and a partial answer to the oft-raised question of the role of a revolutionary in socialist society.

Capitalist ideologues use twin arguments to belittle and slander the role of Communists and their parties in socialist countries. They cast aspersions on party members by ascribing their own behavior pattern to them, and argue that, since Communists belong to the party in power, their membership must be inspired by opportunism and careerism. From this they imply that



Communist parties, as ruling parties, violate the interests of the majority of the population. Their favorite euphemism is that there is a new "elite."

I talked to many SED members about their motives for joining, and about their role as party members. For the veterans these were clear. They had fought in the ranks of the revolutionary workers' movement, had been tortured by the fascists in concentration camps. Building a better, a socially just society, had been their lifelong goal, and they rejoiced in their country's achievements. Others had lived through the terror of fascism and war and had found, when faced with the need to build a new life, that the Communists had the only viable program and were most active in the Gargantuan effort to restore normal life.

But why do young people join the SED if it is not, as socialism's detractors claim, for opportunistic reasons, to further their own careers?

"I agreed to join the party because party members are the most active force in the plant," a young worker at the giant Leuna Chemical Works told me. "They are the best workers and they care about each individual. I thought it the most direct way to make my influence felt. I had been active in the union before, but I realized that the Communists are the ones who take the initiatives. We carry through our party's program on a day-to-day basis. And if we can improve production in our plant it helps improve the living standard." He went on to say that, while party membership is voluntary, members agree to submit to the party's discipline, attend meetings, discuss party decisions and, once such decisions are adopted, to help carry them through. "There aren't any material advantages," he said. "On the contrary, party members are asked to take the most difficult jobs, to set examples and, to give up a lot of our free time. We have to account for our conduct and our activities to the party club." He added, a bit diffi-

dently, "It does give you the satisfaction of helping to make socialism work better."

His explanation, extracted after considerable prodding – at first he said it was "natural" for him to belong to the SED and that it was his "class duty" – bears out the edict of the party's constitution which directs members, in Chapter 1, section 2b, "to carry out actively the decisions of the party ... to show model socialist attitudes toward work ... to treat fellow workers with attention and respect and fulfill social responsibilities in an exemplary manner."

Among the duties of a party member is also listed, in section 2c, the task to "strengthen continuously the party's ties with the masses of the people, to explain to them the meaning of the party's policies and decisions ..."

A young scientist, a bit of an ivory-tower type, when asked what he considered his most important task as a party member, replied without hesitation that it was the job of "talking to my colleagues to explain the line of our party."

Something else militates against careerism. Webster's New World dictionary defines a careerist as "a person interested chiefly in achieving his own professional ambitions, to the neglect of other things." Under socialism, professional ambition cannot so easily be separated from "other things." It is the presumed part of each citizen's life to participate in public affairs, and social pressure for such activities is strong.

## No room for bureaucracy or elitism

This does not mean that there are no SED members who do not live up to the standards of conduct set for them. But in such cases, peer criticism is very strong. I have heard devastating characterizations of party members



who were guilty of bureaucratic behavior, individualism and elitism. Rejection of such conduct is backed up by the SED Constitution, which provides that it is the duty of all members "to oppose subjectivism, disregard of the collective, egoism and both the glossing over of problems and euphoric attitudes toward successes; to fight any attempts at suppressing criticism, replacing it with excuses and flattery, and to encourage self-criticism from below . . ."

Even this is not an ironclad insurance against abuses. An important public tool is the examination of anti-social and antisocialist attitudes through cultural means. There are many novels, plays, films, cartoons, jokes and satirical cabarets dealing with questions of socialist attitudes. Most popular are the satirical cabarets, which are booked-up months in advance. They hold up before society its aberrations, from petty bribery to bureaucracy, from patronage, egotism and sloppy work habits to petty-bourgeois behavior, including male-supremacist attitudes. Even more interesting than the professional groups are the amateur satire groups run by the plants. Their focus is sharper and, as I was told in several plants, they wield considerable influence. Such public criticism is encouraged by the party as an aid in improving the socialist qualities of life.

There are also extensive procedures within the SED to control standards and to assure the right of each member to voice complaints and criticism "up to and including the Central Committee and to insist upon a reply dealing with the essence of the question raised."<sup>1</sup>

Even more important than such internal safeguards to guarantee that party members will represent the interests of the majority of the population is the SED's membership composition.

There are a little more than two million SED members among the 12,5 million GDR citizens over 18 years of age. In recruiting new members, political commitment

and high moral and personal standards are not the only criteria. A policy of recruiting a majority of workers is strictly adhered to. As a result, 56.1 percent of the membership belongs to the working class, 20 percent to the intelligentsia, 11.5 percent are white-collar workers, and the rest are cooperative farmers and others. As to their social origin, 74.9 percent of the members have working-class backgrounds, either through their parents or through their own working experience early in life.

I know of several young intellectuals whose applications for membership were deferred because the recruitment quota for intellectuals in their particular district had been filled.

This is an essential feature of working-class power and guarantees that the party's policies are in line with the interests of the majority of the population. As the SED program states it: "The working class is the principal political and social force in social progress and the numerically strongest class. It holds political power, it is directly linked to socialist property and it produces the bulk of the material wealth of society at large. Its interests reflect the fundamental interests of the entire people."<sup>2</sup>

This is the reason great stress is put on strong party organizations in the most important industries and their direct representation in all party bodies and among deputies at all levels.

Insistence on a working-class majority among party membership also gives the lie to the widespread accusation that socialism creates a "new elite" or "ruling class." Communists make no claim that socialism is a classless society. It is the rule of the working class, which constitutes the majority of the population. Thus, the SED program asserts: "The leading role of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist party, as well as the importance of the trade unions, increases in all fields of social endeavor during the construction of an advanced



socialist society. The party will continue to direct its efforts toward strengthening the influence of the working class in all spheres of human activities."<sup>3</sup> The program continues to outline the alliance between the working class and other sections of the population. The need to maintain the majority rule of the working class is the reason for the quota system in the SED.

At the Mansfeld Copper Mining and Processing enterprises in Eisleben, I met with a group of workers and trade-union officials. They discussed their production effort, their participation in economic planning and also their recreational activities. One of them told me about a trip that 800 workers and their spouses had taken to Berlin, where they attended a variety show and dance at the newly opened Palace of the Republic. They were taken to Berlin in buses and housed in one of the city's best hotels. "You should have seen how the police arranged the right-of-way for us," he said. At that point one of the others interjected, half jokingly, "After all, we are the ruling class." The working class is the "new elite."

One way to secure the leading position of the working class and its party lies in the organization of the SED. Party clubs are organized at the workplace and the only exceptions are for pensioners, free lance workers, and homemakers who belong to community clubs. In the GDR this concentration is so important because it is a way in which the workers exert direct influence over the economic development.

It is sometimes argued that some capitalist countries, such as the FRG, Austria and – intermittently – Great Britain, are ruled by Social Democratic parties which claim to represent the working class, recruit the majority of their membership from it, and that their rule is therefore "socialist." Though their claims of a large working-class membership are correct, their program is far from socialist, because exploitation has not been eliminated.

The absence of even an effort to achieve this is demonstrated by the FRG's Social Democratic Party, which has held power in coalition with the Free Democrats since 1969. This party, at an extraordinary congress in November 1959 in Bad Godesberg, officially renounced the goal of nationalization of the capitalist means of production and guaranteed protection of private ownership.

## Demise of the profit motive

The basic difference between the two systems was described by SED General Secretary Erich Honecker. "The goal of the capitalist economy was and is profit," he said. "Naturally capitalism, which is historically on the defensive, has great resources and power at its disposal. But their profit economy, in the interests of some thousands of multimillionaires, makes it impossible for the governments of the capitalist countries in question to solve the social problems of our time in the interests of the working people . . . Socialism, on the other hand . . . is developing its potential in accordance with the social interests of the masses."<sup>4</sup>

Disregard for these interests in capitalist countries was illustrated in a comparative study of the FRG and GDR. In 1952, it points out, a court decision denied unions in the FRG the right to enforce their political demands by strikes. "The democratically organized trade unions were denied the use of their specific form of struggle, the strike, as a means of demonstration to influence developments. On the other hand, the employers' organizations were not inhibited from using their means of influence, which are outside democratic control – such as participation in the preparation of legislation through 'experts,' the financing of political parties – to wield political influence beyond the constitutionally designated procedures."<sup>5</sup>



While the goal of capitalist society, the profit motive, makes it imperative for capitalist governments to use means "outside democratic control," socialism controls the means of production and opens the door for accountability to the population in a manner unheard of under capitalism. This is true for all phases of life.

In preparation for the Ninth Party Congress in 1976, the SED published and distributed for discussion the 1976 to 1980 economic plan, the new party program and a new party constitution. The population's interest was demonstrated by more than one million opinions and proposals received in writing. They came from party and non-party members, from members of other political parties, from groups and individuals, and from labor teams, and they proposed changes or additions to all three documents. The opinions and proposals were carefully considered, and they resulted in a number of changes and additions to the final documents.

In addition to broad public discussion of new legislation and the economic plans, there is also publication of the deliberations of SED Central Committee meetings. These deal with all important policy questions, foreign and domestic – and not just the general line of policy but also the specifics. A good example of this was contained in the December 1979 report to the Central Committee plenum.

In the months preceding the meeting, there had been much speculation and rumor-mongering about price increases. Prices of gasoline and certain other consumer goods had been increased in neighboring Poland and Czechoslovakia, and the FRG media had done their share in spreading rumors of impending price increases and shortages.

There was, for example, the household linen caper. Sheets and pillowcases suddenly disappeared from stores. An economist told me that there had been an unusually high demand from foreign tourists because

"our linens are cheaper. When this trend became evident, the Western media spoke repeatedly about a 'linen shortage' and that really set it off. People started buying linens as if production had been discontinued. In fact, we were producing the amount provided in the plan and at the same prices. But this is not the first time that rumor-mongering in the West inspired hoarding. A department SED secretary at the Narva electric-bulb plant told me that many workers had come to her to complain about the shortage. 'I told them that production had been the same as always, and then I asked them if they were really down to their last sheet, in which case I'd be glad to lend them some.'"

After a short time, imported, higher-priced linens appeared in the stores, which again aroused public discontent.

The plenum addressed itself to these questions. General Secretary Honecker's report described how the price explosion on the capitalist world market since 1973 had created problems, especially for a country with as few natural resources as the GDR. He pointed out that the export goods required to cover oil imports had tripled since the early 1970s. The economic situation was difficult. Despite this, he said, it had been decided that "our past policy of stable prices for basic consumer goods, rents and services will be continued." The services include fares on public transportation, utilities, and all essential food and household items. Prices for these services have remained the same for as long as people can remember.

"Of course," Honecker continued, "the justified question was raised how we can sustain this," especially since increased industrial wholesale prices had added a 66 billion mark burden on industrial enterprises. "It is understandable that such increased costs raise the question as to whether the increase can be absorbed by higher effectiveness and lower production costs, or if it should



not, at least partially, be passed on to the consumer. However, we rejected proposals for a general price increase, but that does not mean that the economic problems in this connection can be ignored."

The report then explained that the solution will be sought in a three-level price structure. The basic items of daily necessity will remain at their previous low level and will have to be supported by increasing subsidies. "There are few countries in the world which can make such a claim," Honecker said. For other consumer goods, two price levels will prevail. The medium price range must, the report said, "generally cover the cost and include a normal surplus" for the producer, because continued price support in that category would mean that subsidies would reach an unacceptable level. The third level consists of non-essential luxury items, for which prices are high.

The same section of the report explains why some hard consumer goods are in short supply. "What we have to export to compensate for the increase in raw material prices cannot be sold again at home." This concerns such items as home freezers which, at the time, were in short supply. Then the report explains why. "We cannot cut the investment funds. The material-technological basis is indispensable to the steady and long-range improvement of working and living conditions. For this [improvement of conditions]," Honecker concluded, "the working class has the promise of our party, and our party has the promise of the working class."

The discussion about prices, prior to Honecker's speech, had been surprising in the way rank-and-file SED members and even some non-party members I spoke to expressed a sense of responsibility. They weren't simply griping about possible price increases but were expressing a sense of responsibility for the future of the economy. "We can't continue to absorb the increased cost of raw materials," a tool maker, member of the SED, told me.

"We do have reserves in the plant, but I don't think we can cover the increased cost just by increasing productivity."

My friend at Narva had expressed a sense of urgency. "Rumors are just flying. Everybody knows that we don't live on a desert island and that we must make a move." This was after the previously mentioned price increases in other socialist countries. The suggestions for remedies varied widely, but these people all said "we," showing their identification with the party and government.

## Accountable to the people

Accountability of the ruling authorities goes beyond public discussion of economic, political and legislative matters. An extensive system of public controls – with regulations to enforce them – responds to public demands.

By law, every store and restaurant must have a customers' book, in which complaints, suggestions and sometimes praise are entered. I once went to a restaurant with a friend. We found the waitress quite rude and my friend asked to see the manager. Our waitress claimed that the manager was unavailable, so my friend asked for the customers' book. The waitress's attitude changed magically. The manager was found, and she brought the book with her but argued that no entry should be made, since the waitress "who is usually a good worker," had family difficulties – the probable source of her offensive behavior. The manager added that she would make sure there would be no recurrence.

This customers' book is subject to inspection by elected officials as well as the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (ABI).

ABI members – unpaid volunteers – visit shops and catering establishments unannounced to check on quality,



service and hygiene. They look through the customers' book for complaints and for suggestions. On this level they are consumer advocates, and the pains to which the restaurant manager went to avoid entry of our complaint shows that the ABI members are deeply respected.

Consumer advocacy is just one of the ABI's functions. It was formed by decision of the Sixth SED Congress in 1963, as the result of the realization "that in socialism the control of the effectiveness of social production is a necessity which is in the interest of all of society."<sup>6</sup>

While consumer advocacy was the initial task, the ABI developed into an organ of popular control of plan fulfillment, violations of state discipline and fulfillment of export obligations, and a force for developing resistance toward waste and inefficiency in the economy. Their work "contributed greatly in developing the economic thinking of the workers."<sup>7</sup>

The ABI is one form of control. It has over 200,000 volunteers working in more than 20,000 groups. Citizens' petitions are another form of accountability, which moves from the population to the elected officials.

I discussed this with the mayor of Lichtenberg, the district I lived in. He told me that they receive an average of 200 petitions a month, dealing with such diverse matters as leaky roofs or other violations of the housing code, street lighting, public transport, playgrounds and retail distribution. Each petition must be checked, and the petitioner must receive a reply within four weeks. That is the law. "There are some suggestions and complaints we can take care of ourselves. Others are referred to government agencies, such as the transit authority or the housing department or to public organizations like the Free German Youth or the People's Solidarity.

"There are petitions that have to be rejected. We cannot distribute more apartments than we have nor build facilities for which we have no capacity. But regardless of our decision, the citizens can appeal to a higher body.

In fact, quite a few people send their petitions to all levels at once, from our office to the State Council. It is a lot of work, but it does help improve the community, and people have gotten used to it and regard the right to petition as a matter of course."

That people's needs are a prime concern of the government and therefore of its ruling party is a fact taken very much for granted. While people complain about the price of coffee, hard liquor and imported clothes, or the difficulty in getting their cars repaired, they take the steady improvement in social services and working conditions for granted. This is, after all, what the SED has promised them. An interesting commentary on the population's certainty that their security and basic necessities are guaranteed came from one of the GDR's most avid critics, the late Peter C. Ludz, GDR "expert" and "all-German" adviser to the FRG government. A series of articles published by the FRG newsweekly *Der Spiegel* at the occasion of the GDR's thirtieth anniversary quoted Ludz: "The people take the social commitments of the SED for granted and expect constant improvements. They believe that they have a right to social improvement based on their hard work. To put it differently, they take the SED at its word."<sup>8</sup>



## 17 Class and Nation

In mid-1979 the people of the two German states were confronted with very different perspectives. According to FRG government publications, for the first six months of that year the population of the Federal Republic of Germany faced increasing insecurity and deterioration of their living standards. Unemployment figures hovered around the one-million mark – about 5 percent of the workforce – as it had since 1975, and the cost-of-living index was on an inexorable upgrade.

Winners in the economy were, not surprisingly, big-business enterprises. According to financial reports for the first quarter of 1979, Hoechst AG showed an increase in earnings before taxes of 23 percent compared with the same period in 1978, BASF 49 percent and Volkswagen 7 percent, with the value of its stock rising from 53.50 to 63 marks. Overall net business and financial incomes rose nearly 20 percent in that first quarter.

In contrast, the German Institute for Economics (DIW) reported that average wages in the first quarter had risen about 4 percent, an increase virtually wiped out by the rising inflation rate of over 3 percent. By May the cost-of-living index had risen 3.8 percent compared with the same period in 1978, and the nation was faced with a surtax which would increase it a further 0.6 to 0.7 percent as well as with a rent increase on July 1.

In the German Democratic Republic, full employment prevailed. The average income of workers and employees had risen by 3.7 percent in the first six months of the year, while the cost of basic consumer goods and services remained stable. This was achieved by a 6.9-billion-mark



state subsidy for public transport and consumer prices, a 7.5 percent increase over the same period in 1978 and a 3.9-billion-mark rent support, representing a 12.3 percent increase over the previous year. In other words, instead of passing the increased costs onto the consumer the state picked up the tab.

In this connection, it is significant to note that while the FRG derives 50 percent of its state budget from payroll taxes, they only amount to 5 percent of the revenue in the GDR, where the bulk of the state funds comes from the income of state-owned enterprises.

According to plan, 74,121 housing units were built or reconstructed in the first six months of 1979, improving the housing conditions for 230,000 people. State investments for this building program amounted to 18.4 billion marks.

Beginning January 1, 1979, paid vacations for 7.6 million working people were increased by at least three days to a minimum paid vacation of 18 working days.

One more statistic. In the FRG, the military expenditures amount to 27.2 percent of the budget, making it the highest per capita military burden in Western Europe. The GDR on the other hand, spends 6.2 percent of its budget for military purposes, which, the Central Statistical Administration says, "assures the country's defense needs."

This comparison, which contrasts security and a steadily rising increase in the quality of life for the 17 million people in the GDR with deterioration of the living standard and an uncertain future for the FRG's 60 million, could be expanded almost indefinitely. But those few facts should suffice to indicate the basically different directions of development of the two states which this year observe the 30th anniversary of their existence.

The significance of this comparison becomes more apparent as we turn to consideration of the political and social features of the two states.

## Marxist view of nation

The dissimilar developments of the two states bring into focus differences in the lives of the peoples and their development as different and distinct nations. They confirm the Marxist-Leninist view that class relations are the decisive element in the development of the nation.

The historic impulse for the rise of nations is discussed by GDR philosopher Alfred Kosing.

"The creation of a *national market*, the joint interests of the bourgeoisie based on the development of the productive forces, is the most important social factor in the formation of the nation," he writes. "Economic relations and interests are the main motor force of national integration and of all political activities aimed at formation of the nation. This means that the national relations, national bonds and nations are not a simple continuation of tribal, kin or ethnic ties, but in their social quality are exclusively determined by capitalist production relations."

Kosing goes on to explain that social and cultural factors are important and "can play a significant integrating role in the development of national relations," but cannot "be a determining factor and decisive impetus for the formative process of a nation."<sup>1</sup>

The role of the state apparatus as the means of maintaining power over the nation was amplified by Hermann Axen, member of the Political Bureau of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), in a speech on June 7, 1973, about the development of a socialist nation in the GDR.

"The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat always included the struggle for leadership of the nation in the history of our nation as well as in that of any other nation. For this reason, we distinguish two class lines with regard to the national question. On the one hand, there were the haute bourgeoisie and the big



landowners, who exercised their brutal dictatorship under the camouflage of bringing about national unity, while at the same time seeking to expand their sphere of control by means of acts of aggression and wars against other nations. On the other hand, there were the workers and working people whose interests called for the liquidation of the exploiting classes, so that the social antagonisms within the nation could be overcome and its peaceful coexistence with other nations assured."

This point had been made in 1848 by Marx and Engels writing in the Communist Manifesto: "Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word."<sup>2</sup>

### Class struggle for Germany's future

The struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class and its allies for control of the state apparatus and thus for the destiny of the nation is easily documented for post-World War II Germany.

The Potsdam Agreement of the four wartime allies – the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France – had decreed that Germany was to be demilitarized, denazified and democratized, that the arms industry was to be liquidated and big-business enterprises were to be decartelized. It stipulated that the German people must rebuild their lives on a democratic and peaceful basis.

This agreement, though signed by the governments of the four powers, was contrary to capitalist class interests. Even before it was concluded in August 1945, it had encountered widespread opposition among the ruling class of the three Western signatories.

Thus two weeks after the unconditional surrender of the German fascists British Prime Minister Winston

Churchill attempted to form a provisional government of fascist German generals, a move which was stopped only by strong Soviet protests.<sup>3</sup>

A little later, Dr. Konrad Adenauer, who was to become the leader of the Christian Democratic Party and the FRG's first chancellor, proposed the immediate formation of a federal state from the three Western occupation zones. His fellow Christian Democrat Erich Koehler, who later became the first president of the *Bundes-tag*, the FRG parliament, was even more forthright about his class interests when he announced, in 1946, "We reject the unity of Germany if it enables the socialist forces in Germany to rule the entire country as a result."

An important section of the U.S. ruling class worked along similar lines even before the victory of Hitler. In April 1945, a secret meeting was called at the State Department. It was attended by John Foster Dulles, who became Secretary of State in 1953, General William H. Draper, John C. McCloy, and representatives of important industrial and banking interests, especially those with investments in Germany like General Motors.

News of this meeting was leaked to the *Congressional Record* and showed that the subject under discussion had been establishment of a lenient peace with Germany in order to make that country a bulwark against the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

In its July 24, 1947 issue, *Newsweek* wrote that Washington officialdom felt that a continuation of the Four Power rule in Germany would result in a Communist takeover of the country and that it would therefore be preferable "to save part of Germany for the Western powers." The New York *Herald Tribune* of December 20, 1947, expressed the hope that "the division of Germany will give us a free hand in integrating West Germany in a system of the Western states."

The following facts – well-known but largely disregarded by Western historians – illustrate the ruthless-



ness with which international imperialism went about the division of Germany to realize their class interests:

- In September 1946, the British and U.S. military governments formed an economic unit of their occupation zones, in violation of the Potsdam Agreement.

- In September 1947, the Marshall Plan conference – attended by 16 states – adopted a decision to incorporate the Western occupation zones into their planning.

- In the spring of 1948, the Western occupation powers held a conference in London to discuss a joint policy toward Germany from which the Soviet Union was excluded but to which the Benelux countries were invited. At that conference a recommendation was made that the minister presidents of the German states in the Western zones appoint an assembly to draft a constitution and to coordinate the economies of the three Western zones.

- In June 1948, the Western occupation powers instituted a separate currency reform, which they extended to their sectors of Berlin, 110 miles inside the Soviet Zone.

Hand in hand with these maneuvers went a vigorous campaign to suppress all popular movements for an anti-fascist, democratic state. Unification of the Communist and Social Democratic parties, for which there was broad support among the working class, was forbidden. Communists and other anti-fascists were forced out of administrative posts. West Berlin sociology professor, Theo Pirker, was quoted by the FRG newsweekly *Der Spiegel* (March 1979) as saying that the postwar hope that “victims of the Nazi regime and resistance fighters would become a representative force in the economic and cultural reconstruction has not been fulfilled.” When splitting activities entered a decisive phase in 1948, all Communist newspapers were banned for six months.

Popular resistance to the splitting tactics resulted in the formation of the German People's Congress movement for Unity and a Just Peace. Its first national assembly convened in December 1947 in Berlin. Delegates,

one-third of them from the Western zones, represented five political parties, including the West German Social Democratic Party, and six mass organizations. It was the first all-German, non-partisan representative assembly in postwar Germany. The gathering unanimously elected a 17-member delegation to submit proposals for the creation of a united Germany to the foreign ministers conference in London but they were denied British visas.

On May 23, 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, to make two-thirds of Germany safe for capitalism. The cynicism of this action is expressed in the FRG Constitution's preamble, which states it “desires to preserve the national and state unity” of the German people and calls upon “the entire German people to complete the unity and freedom of Germany.”

With the passage of this constitution, the bourgeoisie in the Western occupation zones not only safeguarded their class interests but served notice of its intention to subordinate the remaining third of the German nation to their purposes.

Even after the two German states had emerged, the FRG ruling class and its imperialist backers were unwilling to accept this state of affairs. For two decades they applied enormous economic and diplomatic pressure on the GDR. In violation of all rules of international law and diplomacy, for example, the FRG brazenly threatened to break off diplomatic relations with any state entertaining such relations with the GDR. However this “sole representation claim” became more and more unacceptable to other countries as the strength of the socialist community grew and the GDR's economic strength increased. By the early 1970s, the FRG was forced to conclude international agreements with the GDR, and by 1974, permanent diplomatic representations were exchanged between the two countries, though this is still short of full diplomatic recognition.



## Emergence of a socialist German nation

Meanwhile the administrative organs in the Soviet Zone, with full support of the occupation forces, set about to transform the state power to serve the interests of the working class and its allies. To accomplish the directives of the Potsdam Agreement, denazification, demilitarization and decartelization were undertaken. This anti-fascist, democratic transformation was only possible by dismantling the fascist state apparatus and replacing it with a power structure committed to anti-fascist, democratic goals. Among the steps taken was the purging from the state apparatus, the judiciary, the educational system and the cultural establishment, of all fascists and war criminals.

The first step taken to change production relations in favor of the working class was the land reform, in 1945, in which the large holdings of Junkers and fascists were distributed to poor peasants and agricultural workers. Next came the 1946 referendum in Saxony on the nationalization of enterprises owned by Nazi- and war criminals – approved by an overwhelming majority.

Similar steps, when proposed by the population in the Western zones, were frustrated by the occupation authorities. One such step was a law passed by the state legislature in Rhineland-Westphalia for the nationalization of the Ruhr coal mines; another was Article 41 of the Hessian state constitution calling for socialization of key industries and banks, which had been adopted by a 71.9 percent majority of the voters.<sup>5</sup>

In the Soviet Zone, on the initiative of the Communists, a broad coalition of anti-fascist, democratic political parties and mass organizations was created, and step by step involved in the decision-making process. As a consequence of these efforts to translate the battlefield victory over German imperialism into a permanent victory of the people over their exploiters, the German Democratic Republic was founded on October 7, 1949.

In his June 1973 speech, Axen explained the significance of these struggles. He characterized the efforts of the democratic forces in the Soviet Zone as “a struggle for the interests of the nation, in the best sense of the word. For a long time our party clung to its aim of bringing about a democratic and progressive development in the whole of Germany and in this way frustrating the imperialist policy of dividing Germany, and it was absolutely justified to do so as long as there was the faintest chance of success. In this connection, there was no doubt from the very outset about the class character of the policy pursued by the imperialist occupation powers and about their working hand-in-glove with German monopoly capital... Together with all other anti-fascist, democratic forces the Socialist Unity Party of Germany waged a consistent struggle against the foundation of a separate West German state, and for a united, anti-fascist, democratic republic.”

## The process of national development

The following Marxist definition of the nation is offered in the book *Leninism and the National Question*: “The nation is a lasting historical community of people constituting a form of social development based on the community of *economic life* in combination with the community of language, territory, culture, consciousness and psychology.” (My emphasis—M.P.)<sup>6</sup>

Bourgeois propaganda, in its drive to “safeguard the unity of the German nation,” denies – that with the divergence of economic conditions, all social, cultural, consciousness, and psychological factors undergo a profound change, so that in its three decades of existence, the GDR has developed national characteristics quite different from those in the capitalist FRG.

The most significant change that takes place in the



superstructure is in the consciousness of the population. When the means of production are socialized, the workers cease to be the object of exploitation and become the owners of the means of production. The first congress of the SED, in 1946, placed it this way: "Our people in the People's Owned Enterprises must learn that it is theirs and the people's property that they administer, and that the results of their labor benefit the entire people."

By now, it has taken hold in the consciousness of the vast majority of GDR citizens that improvements in the living standard are directly related to material production and the motto that "we can only consume what we produce" has stimulated broad participation among the population to increase the common wealth and to enhance the common welfare.

Two examples illustrate this. One is the movement of innovators who develop methods for improving production, either as individuals or as groups and collectives, often composed of workers and technicians. These innovators do receive a material reward for their effort, depending on the nature of invention, but the reward is usually small and generally not the main impulse for the effort. In 1965, this movement involved 13.4 percent of the workforce and brought an increase in the national income for that year of 1.242 million marks. By 1977, 32.1 percent of the workforce was involved and produced a gain of 4.125 million marks.

Another expression of socialist consciousness are the citizens' initiatives. They are volunteer efforts to improve community facilities, organized by the National Front, a coalition of political and public organizations. The purpose of their effort is to build community facilities not provided for in the state plan, and they work closely with local plants, who provide the materials and facilities. In 1975, these activities netted 2,002 playgrounds, 1,790 sports facilities, the free decoration of 60,000

apartments of senior citizens, repairs and maintenance jobs on apartment houses worth 1.5 billion marks, the building or renovating of over 31,000 places for child-care facilities and other similar projects.

In the FRG, consciousness is reflected by two class points of view. That of the ruling class can be summed up by a quote from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* of October 6, 1978, which complains that the primary cause of economic difficulties is the fact that "too little is done to improve the growth conditions of our economy and too much for various 'social concerns.'" Working-class consciousness, on the other hand, is reflected in the 1979 Action Program of the German Trade Union Federation (DGB), albeit under Social Democratic leadership. The program calls for achieving full employment through a policy which would assure an adequate number of jobs and on-the-job training facilities, as well as improvement in working conditions. It demands that rationalization and automation should serve to improve work and living conditions and the guarantee that such improvements in production would not have adverse effects for the workers.

It also demands protection against firing, a special program of protection for older workers in connection with technological changes, and other, similar demands which are an expression of struggle against the exploiting class.

In the GDR all these demands have been achieved and are codified in the law. They are also taken for granted – a historic achievement in the consciousness of the people.

The overriding cultural difference lies in the two nations' relation to their fascist past. This chapter of inglorious history has been so vigorously suppressed in the FRG that it came as a surprise to millions of viewers when the TV series "Holocaust" was screened in 1978. Hundreds of thousands said that they had not known about the genocide against the Jews.



This ignorance about the fascist past was borne out by a survey among schoolchildren in 1976 and 1977, conducted by Dieter Bossmann and published as a book entitled *What I have heard about Hitler*.<sup>7</sup> In it, excerpts of over 3,000 student compositions, from different types of schools and from all over the FRG, show the ignorance of the 11 to 19-year-olds in the FRG about the subject. A few random selections illustrate this: "If Hitler were alive today there would be fewer crimes" (age 15); "His aim was the equality of human beings. Perhaps his intentions were not so bad" (age 15); "Adolf Hitler was a social and national politician" (age 14); "One thing I can't understand, why we are not permitted to wear a swastika" (age 13); "I know that he was a member of the Communist Party" (age 13); "He was born in 1800" (age 14); "His first war was against the Russians. Hitler chased them like hares" (age 13).

Since then the FRG scene has been flooded with Nazi-nostalgia books, and with films and records lauding the exploits of Hitler, his aides and generals. Among them are such "documentary" apologies as Joachim Fest's book and widely shown movie, *Hitler - a Career*.

In contrast, GDR youth are well acquainted with fascist crimes and their class causes. All ninth-grade history classes deal with this question. Before reaching the age of 14 - when they are accepted into the adult community - all schoolchildren are taken to former concentration camps; they have discussions with anti-fascist resistance fighters or heroes of the working-class movement.

There are countless books, plays, films and exhibits dealing with the struggle against fascism and the humanist and working-class traditions in literature and art. The reader will recall that when the first theater reopened in the Soviet sector of Berlin after the victory over fascism, it staged "Nathan der Weise" by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), which is a plea for tolerance and human brotherhood and in which the protagonist is a Jew.

Authorities in the Soviet Zone, and later in the GDR, took great pains to root out fascist, racist, revanchist and warmongering ideas among the population. Not only were all fascist teachers removed and fascist books banned, but this determination to rout fascist ideas found its expression in the GDR Constitution. Article 6, section 5 directs that "Militarist and revanchist propaganda in all forms, warmongering and the manifestations of hatred against creeds, races and nations are punished as crimes."

The dominant reactionary culture in the FRG does not negate the progressive minority who struggle against the neo-fascist flood, and the contributions made by humanist and progressive artists and intellectuals. It just serves to underscore the fact that two class cultures exist side by side in a capitalist nation. Since socialism does away with class antagonism, it also sets the stage for a single national culture based on the needs of the working class.

"Step by step the socialist German national culture emerged," the *Summary History of the SED* states. "In the course of the socialist revolution in the realm of ideology and culture, achieved through the purposeful work of the party, the ideology of the working class gradually became the dominant ideology of the entire public life in the GDR."<sup>8</sup>

This is basically the point about so-called dissident culture. Though the confines of this book do not permit an analysis, such works usually can easily be proven to represent the interests of the capitalist class in overt or covert ways.

The GDR Constitution quite clearly defines the cultural values it wishes to promote. In Article 18, section 1, it says:

"Socialist national culture is one of the foundations of socialist society. The GDR fosters and protects socialist culture, which serves peace, humanism and the develop-



ment of socialist society. It combats imperialist anti-culture, which serves psychological warfare and the degradation of man..."

In addition to the eradication of reactionary cultural patterns, a new set of values had to be created to govern relations among people. In his above quoted speech, Axen discusses this process. "The liquidation of capitalism and the victory of the socialist production relations have not only abolished the causes of the oppression of the people of a given country, but the causes of oppression of other peoples as well, Socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism stem from the same source - the class interests and aims of the working class... The essence of socialist patriotism is organically linked to proletarian internationalism."

Proletarian internationalism is practiced by the GDR government in its relation with other countries. It has, for example, recognized liberation movements, such as the PLO, SWAPO and the African National Congress, and offers them all possible support.

The GDR government has also involved the entire population in support of international solidarity. All public and political organizations participate in this effort, but the greatest support comes from the 8.6-million-strong Free German Trade Union Federation. In 1978, over 200 million marks were raised among the population by voluntary contributions.

An important aspect in the development of the socialist German nation is its friendship with other members of the socialist community. Because class relations in socialist countries are alike, their national and cultural development is based on similar premises, despite different historical and ethnic backgrounds. Yet, this relationship is much closer than that of two nations of similar historical and ethnic background but different class relations, such as the FRG.

This is summed up in the Program of the Socialist

Unity Party, as adopted at its Ninth Congress in 1976. "A socialist way of life is becoming more pronounced, with changes taking place in beliefs and attitudes, customs and habits," it states. "A socialist consciousness is emerging, which organically combines socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism." The program goes on to point out that the SED "in a planned way... directs the process of developing the socialist nation in the GDR more fully, maximizing its advantages on the basis of the social foundations of socialism and bringing it closer to the other socialist nations."



## 18 Peace Is the Prime Need

Strange as it may seem, Defense Minister Heinz Hoffmann and Peter Beyer, a worker at the metallurgical plant of the Mansfeld Copper Mining Enterprises, are both peace activists.

Hoffmann, a machinist by trade, has been a member of the Communist Party since 1930. He fought in the anti-Hitler underground, in the International Brigades in Spain and, after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, in the ranks of the Red Army. Later he became a teacher in an anti-fascist school for German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union.

Beyer, born after the end of the war, works three shifts at the Mansfeld plant. He became a youth-brigade leader whose team achieved a 33 percent increase in production above the projected plan. In 1973, he was awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labor. For a number of years he had been active in the movement for international solidarity. "I always tried to make sure my fellow workers understood what is going on in the world," he told me. "It is not enough to pay into the solidarity fund every month. You have to know the why and what for." Because of his interest in international affairs, he was delegated by his union to represent the Mansfeld workers at a meeting of the GDR Peace Council.

"It was the first time I spoke to that kind of audience and I told them how workers at the point of production conduct the struggle for peace. The Peace Council is a very broad grouping, and among its members are many prominent people — artists and intellectuals and people



with various religious affiliations and also members of other parties." Beyer himself is a member of the SED. As a result of his talk, the Peace Council proposed to the union that he become a member. Later he was elected to the GDR's 20-member delegation to the World Peace Council. Delegates serve five-year terms.

The GDR Peace Council is not a membership organization but a delegated body of political and public organizations. Peace activities are conducted through these organizations, the unions, the political parties, churches and the National Front.

An example of this was a signature campaign in the fall of 1979, in support of the unilateral peace proposals made by Leonid Brezhnev on the occasion of the GDR's 30th anniversary. His proposal projected that the USSR would unilaterally reduce the number of its medium-range nuclear devices in its western areas, provided no additional U.S. devices would be deployed by NATO. It also stipulated that the USSR would reduce its military strength in the GDR. Late in October, the National Council of the National Front decided to conduct a one-month signature drive in support of this proposal. At the end of the drive, the signatures of 96 percent of all citizens over 14 years of age had been secured, and the United Nations General Secretary Dr. Kurt Waldheim was officially informed of this result.

As a member of the Peace Council, Beyer was delegated to the World Peace Assembly in Warsaw in 1977 and after that became a member of the World Peace Council and the youngest GDR delegate. He recalled that, in Warsaw, he had been deeply impressed by Abe Feinglass, vice-president of the United Food and Commercial Workers and a vice-president of the World Peace Council. "He had a great grasp of the working-class problems in your country and I was very impressed with his sincerity and his fighting spirit."

Beyer admitted that it was sometimes difficult to com-

bine his work in the shop with his public duties. His brigade works rotating shifts, and though he gets time off with pay for his official functions, he says that a lot of his free time is swallowed by his peace activities. "I don't mind," he said. "Another war is just unthinkable." He felt that his country has a special responsibility for peace because his country has the longest frontier dividing socialism and capitalism in Europe.

Defense Minister Hoffmann, a military man and a member of the SED's Central Committee, is explicit about his country's desire for peace; he's a peace-monger general. "We socialist military forces are very strongly interested in the implementation of military detente and the decrease in the level of military balance," he told a plenary meeting of the SED in December 1979. "This would not only give us added means for the fulfillment of material and cultural needs but ease our basic task of securing peace and socialism."

However, Defense Minister Hoffmann is no pacifist. Though he maintained that "securing peace and the strengthening of our socialist social and state order... are the basic requirements, the condition for every step ahead in the improvement of the material and cultural living standard of our people," he also left no doubt that they must be defended. "We cannot be passive observers to the steps taken by the NATO states to escalate war preparations and the development of the scientific, technological and economic basis for the creation of new weapons systems and their development." And he soberly added that "the needs of our military protection for our socialist achievement will increase."

## Realizing a dream of humankind

The common interests of the people, the government and its military are a unique feature of socialism. They result from the fact that, because of public ownership of the



means of production, no profit can be made from wars, and peace is in the overriding interests of everyone. Max Schmidt, director of the GDR Institute for International Politics and Economics, made this point in an article on the relation between peace and socialism.

"For centuries humankind has been filled with the desire for peace," he wrote. "But only since the establishment of socialist state power can it be demonstrated that the people are able to create social conditions which remove the causes of war and bring about the basis for lasting peace. The new, socialist society raises the question of peace and war on an entirely new basis. It elevates the desire for peace and the struggle to secure it as a main goal for the state and its citizens. . . . The existence of a social order which has overcome the antagonism resulting from the capitalist ownership of the means of production is the best guarantee for peace. On the other hand, the entire history of humankind has shown that wars are the logical result of private property of the means of production."<sup>1</sup>

The existence of socialism with state power and its genuine need for peace has already achieved the longest period of peace in modern European history. Yet, as Defense Minister Hoffmann pointed out, there is still need for defense, for armed forces and for vigilance.

The need springs from imperialist determination to "contain and roll back" socialism, as proclaimed time and time again since the late Harry Truman announced it as his doctrine. To further these aggressive ends, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed in 1949. The FRG's first chancellor, Dr. Konrad Adenauer, told the world in 1952 that "only if the West is strong, is there a real basis for the goal to liberate not only the Soviet Zone but all of Europe east of the iron curtain."<sup>2</sup>

Faced with the declared aggressive intentions of the capitalist powers, the members of the socialist commu-

nity met in Warsaw in May 1955 to conclude a pact for friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance. The pact expressed their determination to extend their political, economic, military and cultural cooperation and called for a coordinated policy to secure peace, to work toward European security, for disarmament and for bans on atomic and mass destruction weapons. The participants – the USSR, Czechoslovakia, GDR, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania (which ceased to participate in 1965) – created a joint military command and a political consultative commission.

This action was in step with an injunction written by Lenin in 1919 to the workers of the Ukraine which warned that "there must be a close military and economic alliance, otherwise the capitalists. . . will strangle us separately."<sup>3</sup>

A telling indication of the source of aggressive intentions comes from a comparison of the introduction of major weapons systems. After the Soviet Union had broken the U.S. atomic monopoly, the United States introduced the hydrogen bomb in 1953 and the Soviet Union followed suit in 1954; Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's) were built by the U.S. in 1955, and in 1957 by the Soviet Union; and Multiple Re-Entry Vehicles (MERV's) in 1964 and 1972 respectively.

The lack of interests in aggressive ventures among the socialist states was acknowledged, rather unexpectedly, by the bourgeois FRG daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, which wrote on August 13, 1979, that "it should be seriously and honestly considered: In the East no one profits from armaments, no stock holders, managers, no retired officers or politicians as expert advisers. There are no arms lobbies as in the West."



"Transit, gas and electricity could be free of charge..."

The significance of the economics of the arms race for socialism, indicated by Defense Minister Hoffmann, was elaborated on by economist Juergen Kuczynski, a member of the GDR Academy of Science and one of the GDR Pugwash scholars.

"Of course the increase in the standard of living, just as civilian production generally, is slowed in all socialist countries by the needs of defense..." he wrote. "The decisive difference in the results of arms production in capitalist and socialist countries is that in capitalist countries they lead to crises and a decline in the living standard of the working people, while in the socialist countries they slow the road to progress. This retardation is considerable when one considers that, without these expenditures, we would have the four-day or 35-hour week, and that we would be closer to Communism because telephone, city transit, gas and electricity could be free of charge for the consumer, and that we would approach a situation where rents could be abolished.

"These economic disadvantages of defense needs clearly show why we must struggle not only for the maintenance of peace, but for purely economic reasons exert all our political and moral strength for the greatest possible advances in disarmament."<sup>4</sup>

The GDR's Ambassador to the United Nations, Peter Florin, concurs in the basic stake his country has in peace. "As you know, our country has a labor shortage," he told me at the GDR's United Nations Mission on New York's Park Avenue. "We could very well use all the personnel now committed to defense needs in the civilian economy. It would help us advance our social and economic programs much faster." He said that bourgeois pundits frequently refer to the fact that the arms race, in addition to being profitable for private enter-

prise, serves the purpose of retarding the economic development of the socialist camp. "This is important to them because they are afraid that the development of our social programs will encourage the people in non-socialist countries to take a closer look at the advantages of socialism." However, he said, their calculations are flawed. Though the acceleration of the arms race will create difficulties, "it will not stop the policy of improving the living standard. The situation is no longer the same as it was in the fifties.

"Our economics have gained and are sufficiently strong now to take care of defense needs and to continue our social advances."

Florin's job at the United Nations is on the front line in the struggle for peace. He explained that the socialist community works together in taking peace initiatives.

"Despite difficulties, we remain firmly committed to peace," he said. "It is not as if today we say we are for peace and tomorrow we take a different tack." The determination of this purpose was incorporated in the country's constitution. In Article 6, section 1, it states that the country "pursues a foreign policy serving socialism and peace, international friendship and security."

This purpose is restated frequently by GDR politicians. SED General Secretary Honecker put it this way: "Located at the border of the social systems of socialism and imperialism, between the NATO block and the Warsaw Pact states, the GDR has a special interest in securing peace. The GDR is and remains ready to work with anyone interested in protecting and extending the carefully constructed basis for European Security."<sup>5</sup>

To document efforts in this direction, and peace efforts in other parts of the world, Ambassador Florin cites examples from the 34th General Assembly of the United Nations. The GDR supported a Soviet resolution asking the Commission on Disarmament in Geneva to prepare



negotiations about nuclear disarmament with the cooperation of the five nuclear-arms powers, of which the USSR is one. This resolution was supported by 120 states "but unfortunately and revealingly the NATO powers did not support it."

A comparison of the decisions of the Foreign Minister Conference of the Warsaw Pact countries in May 1979 and the resolutions offered by member states in the United Nations shows the viability of the concerted peace effort. The Warsaw Pact foreign ministers projected:

- Conclusion of a treaty between all member states of the all-European Conference for Security and Detente (the Helsinki Accord) not to resort to first strike of nuclear or conventional weapons.
- Willingness of all members of the Helsinki Accord to give advance notice of important military movements in Europe.
- Readiness to come to an agreement about the non-proliferation of military maneuvers and the extension of measures to build and strengthen detente in the Mediterranean area.
- Efforts to call an all-European conference about measures to strengthen mutual trust and military detente.

What actually emerged at the 34th General Assembly were ten measures introduced by Warsaw Pact states and Yugoslavia dealing with these issues. They received support from the overwhelming majority of the U.N. member states but were resisted by the NATO countries.

Aligned with the struggle for peace, Ambassador Florin pointed out, is the struggle in support of national liberation and against colonialism and neo-colonialism. This is also incorporated in Article 6 of the Constitution which directs, in section 3, that the GDR "support the states and peoples fighting against imperialism and its colonial regime, for national freedom and independence in their struggle for social progress. . ."

Toward this end, Florin said, the GDR and its allies took various actions in support of the peoples of the Middle East in their fight for self-determination, including the right of the Palestinian people to their own state, and also took actions to condemn the racist regimes in Southern Africa.

He expressed warm praise for the activities of Peter Beyer and all other peace activists. "The United Nations is a body of official representatives of governments," he said. "In the socialist countries the efforts of the governments coincide with the desires of the people for peace. The peoples' movements everywhere for peace and the self-determination of nations spur the U.N. member states. That is why we presented the results of the signature campaign by the National Front on the Soviet offer to reduce its own intermediary ballistic missile systems, which seeks to prevent a buildup of such systems by the NATO forces. The exchanges between government representatives and peoples' movements at the U.N. airs the whole breadth of humankind's desire for peace, and it is made possible by the existence of socialism."



## Postscript on the Future

In the spring of 1981 the people of the United States looked toward the future with apprehension. Policies of detente had been replaced by a new round in the arms race and military expenditures skyrocketed. This was accompanied by an unprecedented attack on, and slashing of social expenditures – for social security, environmental controls, funds for education and job training, culture and health protection, etc. Two hundred and fifty social programs faced the axe. This attack on the peoples' welfare was accompanied by the most aggressive and extensive anti-Soviet, anti-socialist propaganda since the Cold War years of the fifties.

In dramatic contrast to this situation, the perspectives placed before the peoples in the socialist community by their ruling working-class parties through the Congresses held that spring, starting with the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, were exhilarating. These Congresses sharply illustrated the contrast between the two systems. While insecurity, uncertainty and fear beset the people under capitalism, these socialist countries presented the perspectives for a secure and stable future for their people.

The Tenth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party (April 1981) was a case in point. It pulled no punches about the existing difficulties.

In the report of the Central Committee, First Secretary of the SED Erich Honecker put the question of preserving peace at the top of the agenda, calling it "the deciding factor in the present life and future of mankind."

He amplified socialism's stake in peace. "No one in



our country profits from armaments," he said, "no one is interested in appropriating foreign territory and sources of raw materials or trifling with the sovereign rights of other peoples. The work of socialist construction is the product of the industrious creative labor of human beings, and if it is to bear fruit for all to an ever greater extent, it needs peace."

Within this framework the Congress spelled out, to all to read, what needs to be done and what the individual can expect in return.

"In our economic strategy for the eighties," Honecker said, "both social production and national income are increasingly at a highly dynamic rate. This strategy is based on and promotes growth. Economic stagnation or even recession, the spread of which may be observed in capitalist countries, are incompatible with the requirements of socialism. It is a forward direction in which our system develops. Hence, the material needs of society and the individual are rising. However an increase in what is to be distributed necessitates an increase in what is produced beforehand."

In this context the people were told that by 1985 the national income will increase by 28 to 30 percent through an equivalent increase in labor productivity, to be achieved by increased efficiency, more modern technology and scientific advances.

The benefits of this increased production will be a direct wage increase of 20 to 22 percent. Government expenditures for social funds will increase by 26 percent in 1985 as compared with 1980. Large sums of this will be set aside to subsidize housing construction, rents and consumer prices, as well as public transport and utilities. These funds will also be utilized "to satisfy the growing demands of the population in the health sector and their social, intellectual and cultural needs." The real per capita income of the population under this plan will grow by 23 percent in the 1981-85 period.

The documents of the Tenth Congress and the widespread discussions show the consistent growth and improvement in living standards which I observed while researching this book. They show the difficult and exacting process of building a socialist society, but that those engaged in it can look to the future with confidence.

M. P.



## NOTES

### 1 Train Between Two Systems

- <sup>1</sup> In the first decades after the establishment of the GDR, large sums were spent by the West on arranging the defection of GDR specialists. Thus the Bayer Chemical Works in Leverkusen, a subsidiary of I. G. Farben which supplied munition and chemicals for Hitler's war and extermination camps, set up a so-called "Immigrants' Committee" with the objective of recruiting GDR specialists. A "bonus" of 500 to 1,000 marks was paid for each "recruitment." In 1961, the FRG Equalization of Burdens Bank received 37 million marks from the state to grant credits to employers who would set up enterprises in West Germany with workers recruited from the GDR. That same year the Bonn Ministry of Labor and Social Order spent over 4 billion marks for "war victims and similar expenditures." The term "similar expenditures" was a euphemism for recruitment of GDR workers. See: Margrit and John Pittman: *Sense and Nonsense about Berlin*, New Outlook Publishers, New York, 1962, p. 26.
- <sup>2</sup> Rolf Gutermuth, *Ausbeutung in der BRD*. Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1976, pp 213-215.
- <sup>3</sup> Compiled from: *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, 1978 (Statistical Yearbook of the GDR), Berlin, Staatsverlag der DDR, 1978, p. 277.
- <sup>4</sup> Hermann Axen, speech at the international theoretical conference on "Socialist and Communist Construction and World Development," held in Sofia, Bulgaria. Dec. 12-15, 1978, quoted in *Political Affairs*, March 1979, p. 6.



## 2 The New Beginning

- <sup>1</sup> In the three Western occupation zones, formation of political parties was permitted variously between September 15 and December 13, 1945, but because of locally differing rules on legalization the process lasted until well into 1946.
- <sup>2</sup> Gerhart Eisler, Albert Norden, Albert Schreiner, *The Lesson of Germany*. New York, International Publishers, 1945, p. 144 ff.
- <sup>3</sup> At these congresses members of both Communist and Social Democratic Parties from the Western zones were represented. Thus, of 519 Communist delegates, 130 came from Western zones, and 103 of the 548 Social Democratic delegates. This despite the fact that this unification was discouraged in the Western zones by means ranging from official bans to covert support for those opposed.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Streisand, *Deutsche Geschichte in einem Band* (German History in One Volume), Berlin, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1974, p. 414.
- <sup>5</sup> *Dokumente zur deutschen Geschichte, 1942-1945* (Documents of German History, 1942-1945), Berlin, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1977, p. 81.
- <sup>6</sup> John Foster Dulles, *Krieg ohne Frieden*, Vienna, 1950, p. 163.

## 3 The Russians Were Coming

- <sup>1</sup> *Wie die Arbeiter- und Bauernmacht entstand. Erlebnisse aus Sachsen Anhalt*, Halle/Saale, Bezirksausschuß der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschlands, 1960, pp. 38-43 (Translated from the German).
- <sup>2</sup> D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins*, New York, Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1961, Vol. I, p. 252.
- <sup>3</sup> *Dokumente zur deutschen Geschichte 1942-1945*, op. cit.
- <sup>4</sup> Fleming, op. cit., pp. 292-93.

- <sup>5</sup> Potsdam Agreement, section III. See *The Dynamics of World Power - A Documentary History of the United States Foreign Policy 1945-1973*, New York, Chelsea House Publishers in association with McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973, Vol. II, p. 152.
- <sup>6</sup> At the end of 1947, reparations to the Soviet Union and its allies were terminated in the Western occupation zones so that the entire burden of reparations rested with the Soviet Zone. On May 15, 1950, the government of the USSR, together with the government of Poland, lowered the reparations still to be paid by 50 percent.

## 4 Friend and Partner

- <sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin: "Theses on the National Question," from *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1966, p. 246.
- <sup>2</sup> Members of EEC in order of population size are:
 

FRG .....	61,000,000
Italy .....	57,000,000
United Kingdom .....	56,000,000
France .....	53,000,000
Netherlands .....	14,000,000
Belgium .....	10,000,000
Denmark .....	5,000,000
Ireland .....	3,000,000
Luxembourg .....	360,000
- <sup>3</sup> Members of CMEA in order of population size are:
 

USSR .....	262,000,000
Vietnam .....	50,000,000
Poland .....	34,000,000
Romania .....	22,000,000
GDR .....	17,000,000
CSSR .....	15,000,000
Hungary .....	10,000,000
Cuba .....	9,500,000
Bulgaria .....	9,000,000
Mongolia .....	1,500,000

 Yugoslavia is an associate member.
- <sup>4</sup> *Horizont*, No. 24, 1979, pp. 11-12



- <sup>5</sup> The Warsaw Pact was concluded in 1955 by the USSR, Poland, Romania, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. Albania withdrew in 1968.

## 5 Coalitions and Grass Roots Movements

- <sup>1</sup> Albert Norden: *Buendnispolitik der SED* (Coalition policy of the SED), Die soziale Annäherung der Klassen und Schichten während der weiteren Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft. Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1977, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

- <sup>3</sup> *Geschichte der SED, Abriss* (Short history of the SED), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1978, p. 148.

- <sup>4</sup> *Program of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Zeit im Bild*, Dresden, 1976, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

## 6 Anatomy of a Law

- <sup>1</sup> Conflict commissions are elected for two-year terms by work collectives to deal with minor infractions of the law, including violations of the labor code, of public order, and other minor violations of the civil code. They also mediate violations of social conduct and disputes that arise among members of the collective. Communities elected similar commissions, but of four-year terms.

- <sup>2</sup> The 15 commissions of the People's Chamber are: foreign affairs; national defense; constitution and law; industry; construction and transport; agriculture, forestry and food processing; trade and supplies; budget and finance; labor and social policy; health; education; culture; youth affairs; citizens' petitions; rules; mandate commission.

- <sup>3</sup> *DDR - Gesellschaft, Staat, Buerger* (GDR - society, state, citizens), by an authors' collective, Berlin, Staatsverlag der DDR, 1978, p. 184.

- <sup>4</sup> Georg Fuelberth and Helga Knueppel, "Buergerliche und sozialistische Demokratie" (Bourgeois and socialist democracy), in the volume of comparative essays *BRD-DDR - Vergleich der Gesellschaftssysteme* (FRG-GDR - Comparison of social systems), Koeln, Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1976, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 211

## 7 The Right to Work and Share in Management

- <sup>1</sup> *DDR - Gesellschaft, Staat, Buerger*, op. cit., p. 150.

- <sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, New York, International Publishers, 1938, p. 10.

- <sup>3</sup> Guenter Simon, "Ohne sie geht nichts" (Nothing happens without it), *Trade Unions in everyday life of the GDR*, Frankfurt am Main, Nachrichten Verlags Gesellschaft, 1979, p. 94.

- <sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin: "A Great Beginning," *Selected Works*, Volume 3, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 236.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

- <sup>6</sup> *DDR - Gesellschaft, Staat, Buerger*, op. cit., p. 55.

## 8 Union Power

- <sup>1</sup> U. Jaeggli, *Macht und Herrschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Power and Rule in the FRG), Frankfurt/Main, 1970, p. 58, as cited in Karl-Heinz Badstube, *Sozialismus - wahre Heimstatt der Demokratie* (Socialism - true home of democracy), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1979, p. 61 ff.

- <sup>2</sup> Badstube, op. cit., pp. 62-64.

- <sup>3</sup> Harry Tisch, "Das Werk von Millionen" (The work of millions), in *Einheit*, Berlin, No. 9/10, 1979, p. 948.

- <sup>4</sup> Simon, op. cit., p. 100.



## 9 Education to Rule

- <sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, New York, International Publishers, 1976, p. 59.
- <sup>2</sup> H. Diwald, *Das Elend der Wirklichkeit oder "Onkel Toms Huetten"* (The misery of reality or "Uncle Tom's Cabin"), Bildung und Bildungspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Neuwied a. Rhein, 1973, p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> *Horizont*, No. 52, 1979, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>4</sup> Gerda Nolepa/Lilo Steitz, *Wissenschaftlich-technischer Fortschritt - Arbeiterklasse - Schoepfertum* (Scientific-technological progress - working class - creativity.), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1975, p. 84 ff.

## 10 People's Culture

- <sup>1</sup> Kurt Hager, "Socialist Cultural Policy," Speech delivered at the Sixth Session of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Dresden, Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1972, p. 5.
- <sup>2</sup> Professor Lea Grundig, "Ueber das Verhaeltnis von Inhalt und Form" (The relation between content and form), Greifswald, Greifswalder Universitaetsreden, 1972, Pages not numbered. Translated from the German.
- <sup>3</sup> Erich Kuby, "Theater - im Namen des Volkes" (Theater - in the people's name). *Der Stern*, 1975. Number 18, p. 62.
- <sup>4</sup> Dr. Harald Buchl, *Kultur im sozialistischen Betrieb* (Culture in the socialist enterprise), Berlin, Verlag Tribuene, 1974, p. 139 ff.
- <sup>5</sup> Hager, op. cit., p. 9.
- <sup>6</sup> From a talk at a Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in Sofia, December 12-15, 1978, as quoted in *Political Affairs*, March 1979, p. 6.
- <sup>7</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Ueber Kunst und Politik* (About art and politics), Leipzig, Verlag Philipp Reclam jun., 1977, p. 172.

- <sup>8</sup> Elaine Mensh and Harry Mensh, *Behind the Scenes in two Worlds...*, New York, International Publishers, 1978, p. 313.

## 11 Half of Humanity

- <sup>1</sup> *Vorwaerts*, Bonn, August 17, 1978.
- <sup>2</sup> *Die Frau in der DDR* (Women in the GDR), published by an authors' collective for the observance of the 100th anniversary of August Bebel's book, *Women under Socialism*, Panorama, Dresden, 1978, p. 172.
- <sup>3</sup> Marianne Konze: "Frauen in den Laendern der EG" (Women in the EC countries), in *Marxistische Blaetter*, Frankfurt am Main, FRG, March 1979.
- <sup>4</sup> Report of the Central Committee to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party, Berlin, 1976, p. 142.
- <sup>5</sup> *Fuer Dich* (For You), No. 14, 1978.
- <sup>6</sup> GDR Labor Code of 1977, Article 247, Section 1.
- <sup>7</sup> *Program of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany*, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

## 12 Routing Racism and Anti-Semitism

- <sup>1</sup> Klaus Drobisch, Rudi Goguel, Werner Mueller a. o. *Juden unterm Hakenkreuz*, Berlin, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1973, p. 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, 1933-36, Berlin-Weimar, 1968, p. 99.
- <sup>3</sup> Estimates of the magnitude of the damage vary. The above taken from *Juden unterm Hakenkreuz*, op. cit., p. 196.
- <sup>4</sup> *Dokumente zur deutschen Geschichte, 1936-39*, Berlin, VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1977, p. 96.
- <sup>5</sup> *Dokumente zur deutschen Geschichte, 1939-42*, op. cit., p. 142.



<sup>6</sup> Heinz Mode and Siegfried Woelffling, *Zigeuner, der Weg eines Volkes in Deutschland* (Gypsies – the Fate of a People in Germany), Kochler & Amelang, Leipzig, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

#### 14 Sorbs – a National Minority

<sup>1</sup> *Dokumente zur deutschen Geschichte*, op. cit., 1939–42, p. 41.

#### 15 International Solidarity – Antidote to Racism

<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the American Labor Movement*, Vol. 1, New York, International Publishers, 1975, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> *Against Racism, Apartheid und Colonialism*, Documents published by the GDR, 1949–1977, Berlin, Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1978, p. 5.

#### 16 Party of the Ruling Class

<sup>1</sup> *Constitution of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany*, Berlin, 1976, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Program of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany*, Berlin, 1976, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 39 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Honecker, *The German Democratic Republic, Pillar of Peace and Socialism*. New York, International Publishers, 1979, p. 230 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Georg Fuelberth and Helga Kneuppel, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> *Geschichte der SED – Abriss* (Short history of the SED), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1978, p. 449.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>8</sup> *Der Spiegel*, No. 40, 1979, p. 106.

#### 17 Class and Nation

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Kosing, *Nation in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Nation in history and the present), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1976, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Marx-Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party." *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1979, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> *Deutsche Geschichte in Daten* (German History in Dates), Berlin, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1967, p. 821.

<sup>4</sup> *IPW Berichte* (International Economics and Politics Report), Berlin, May 1979, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> "30 Jahre Bundesrepublik" (30 years Federal Republic) in *Rote Blaetter*, Bonn, May 1979, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> P. N. Fedoseyev, editor, *Leninism and the National Question*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Dieter Bossmann, *Was ich ueber Hitler geboert habe...* (What I have heard about Hitler...), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> *Geschichte der SED*, op. cit., p. 565.

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<sup>1</sup> *IPW Berichte*, op. cit., No. 10, 1979, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in *Horizont*, No. 39, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin. "Letter to the Workers and Peasants of the Ukraine," *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> *Abruestung, Wissenschaft, Verantwortung* (Disarmament, science, responsibility), Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1978, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Report to the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, *Neues Deutschland*, December 15/16, 1979.